Platonic Theories of Prayer

Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition

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John Dillon
Andrei Timotin

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Introduction

John Dillon and Andrei Timotin

It is reported, by the pious biographer of Iamblichus, Eunapius of Sardis, that a rumour got started among his pupils, which he laughingly dismissed, that the philosopher, when deep in prayer, would rise fully ten cubits into the air, while his clothing took on a golden hue (*vs.* 458). We do not have to believe in the substance of this rumour, relayed as it is by that very unreliable man—any more than we need to believe certain of the equally pious tales told by the faithful Marinus later about his master Proclus—to derive from it a message about how the power of at least a certain type of ecstatic prayer was viewed in philosophical circles in late antiquity. Such a manifestation would have been regarded as appropriate to the highest level of prayer, as set out by Iamblichus himself in Book V 26 of the *De Mysteriis*, and discussed by a number of contributors to the present volume.

It is the purpose of this collection of essays, based on a set of papers delivered originally for a panel on Prayer at the annual meeting of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies in Cardiff in June 2013, to present, if not a fully comprehensive, then at least a wide-ranging, account of the Platonist theory and practice of prayer, from the Master himself, through the 'Middle Platonic' period, down to Proclus, Damascius, and even beyond, to that mysterious quasi-Platonist figure, Dionysius the Areopagite, covering all levels of prayer, from the lowest to the highest, and giving due consideration to both aspects of the topic, the practice of prayer by Platonists, and the theory of gods and of language that makes prayer possible for them.

One may best begin, perhaps, by endeavouring to provide a definition of prayer. In former days, one might have turned, for such a definition, to an authority such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In the present instance, however, recognising that we are now thoroughly embedded in the electronic age, we have chosen to resort to that fine Internet resource, Wikipedia, where one may find the following most useful summary:

> Prayer is an invocation or act that seeks to activate a rapport with a deity, an object of worship, or a spiritual entity through deliberate communication. Prayer can be a form of religious practice, may be either individual or communal, and take place in public or in private. It may involve the use of words or song. When language is used, prayer may take the form of a hymn, incantation, formal creed, or a spontaneous utterance in the praying person.

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> There are different forms of prayer such as petitionary prayer, prayers of supplication, thanksgiving, and worship/praise. Prayer may be directed towards a deity, spirit, deceased person, or lofty idea, for the purpose of worshipping, requesting guidance, requesting assistance, confessing sins or to express one's thoughts and emotions. Thus, people pray for many reasons, such as personal benefit or for the sake of others.

While one can have little or no quarrel with the overall content of this, one thing that the Wikipedia entry does not specify is that prayer may be regarded as an aspect of philosophy as well as of religion.[1] This is entirely to be expected, in view of the dominance, for the best part of the last two thousand years, in the Western world, of one or another of the Abrahamic religions, whose tendency has been to separate philosophy rigorously from religion, and to assume that prayer is the exclusive concern of the latter. In the Greco-Roman world, however, there was no such firm separation of the two, and certainly no subordination of philosophy to religion—indeed philosophy felt it to be its right, and its duty, to criticize irrational or immoral aspects of popular religious practice, and this includes the improper employment of prayer and supplication, including sacrifice.

One major theme of this volume, in fact, will be the critique of the popular practice of petitionary prayer (*eukhê*, or *proseukhê*). Plato's Socrates sets the tone, by praying only for what is good for him (his prayer at the end of the *Phaedrus* being a much-quoted example); but the theme continues, through Philo of Alexandria and Maximus of Tyre—with a fine satirical treatment by Lucian, in the *Icaromenippus*—to Plotinus, Porphyry and beyond. Any suggestion of bribery or constraint of the gods is to be rejected absolutely. The issue is further complicated in later times by the influence of the Stoic doctrine of determinism, which more or less requires that rational prayer, such as a philosopher would indulge in, can only be for the acceptance of what is inevitable. In any case, it is not for us to decide what is good for us, and a benevolent God will not grant what we ask for in ignorance of our true good, any more than a good doctor will allow his patient's desires to determine his dietary prescriptions or other treatment.

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1 To be fair to Wikipedia, one does find, later in the entry, under the heading 'Rationalist Approach [to Prayer]', the following specification: "In this view, the ultimate goal of prayer is to help train a person to focus on divinity through philosophy and intellectual contemplation." It adds, however, that, though this concept "became popular in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic intellectual circles, it never became the most popular understanding of prayer among the laity in any of these faiths."

Other purposes of prayer, such as supplication, thanksgiving, or simple praise and glorification of the deity, are more widely acceptable to our philosophers—provided, at least, that the gods are praised for the right reasons. As we pass into later Platonism, however, to Plotinus and his successors (though there are some intimations already in Philo), the concept manifests itself that prayer can have a multiplicity of forms, or even levels. Plotinus plainly practised forms of prayer which did not involve words, either uttered or silently conceived, and which could just as properly be regarded as meditative techniques. Iamblichus develops modes of theurgic prayer, which seem not to have been very different in form from the formulae prescribed in the Greek Magical Papyri, including the use of magical names, sacred words, and even strings of vowels, all with the purpose of getting through directly to gods and other superior beings—though not employed, Iamblichus would specify (e.g. in Book VII of the *De Mysteriis*), for the purpose of *constraining* these higher beings, but simply to facilitate them in releasing their beneficent power, as they are more than happy to do.

All these topics and more are discussed in the papers that follow.[2] First of all, since it is referred back to by a number of the other papers in the collection, it was proposed to republish a paper by John M. Dillon, 'The Platonic Philosopher at Prayer', which first appeared in 2002,[3] in the proceedings of another conference, as it touches on most of the themes developed in the other papers of the collection. Inevitably, this results in a measure of overlap with what follows, not least with the contribution of Gilles Dorival, *Modes of Prayer in the Hellenic Tradition*,[4] which also constitutes a most useful introduction to the collection; but in fact the perspectives adopted complement each other rather well. Dorival, for instance, makes good use of the satirical passage from Lucian mentioned above (pp. 28–29), and adduces various other arguments against petitionary prayer.

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2 The essays in this volume, it must be admitted, focus exclusively on the Greek tradition, to the exclusion of any Latin thinkers. However, of those broadly in the Platonist tradition, the only plausible candidate would seem to be St. Augustine, and his views are so suffused with Christian influences (unlike Dionysius the Areopagite, for example, who is covered here) as to render his evidence quite unreliable for our purposes.

3 In *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens*, ed. by Theo Kobusch & Michael Erler, München/Leipzig, 2002, 279–296. We are most grateful to the editors and the publisher for permitting its reproduction.

4 An up-dated version of a text previously published in French: "Païens en prière", in *Prières méditerranéennes hier et aujourd'hui*, ed. by Gilles Dorival & Didier Pralon, Aix-en-Provence, 2000, 87–101.

Following on this, Menahem Luz turns to the fascinating figure of Philo of Alexandria, to show how he combines themes drawn from his close acquaintance with Greek philosophy and culture with elements from his native Jewish tradition, to develop a theory of intellectual contemplation and silent prayer, such as we do not find set out clearly in the Platonic tradition before his time. Also, the idea that the study of the Scriptures, and the teasing out of their 'higher' meaning, is itself a form of prayer seems to anticipate the later Platonist attitude to the study of both Plato himself and such texts as the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

Next we turn to a study by Carl O'Brien focused on the contribution of the Platonizing sophist Maximus of Tyre to the Platonic theory of prayer, particularly in his Orations 5 and 11. As O'Brien recognises, Maximus is presenting 'popular philosophy' to non-specialist audiences, so we must not expect dramatic innovations or profound insights from him, but he is really all the more valuable for that, as presenting a conspectus of philosophic attitudes to prayer in the mid-second century A.D., reinforcing the objections to unsuitable petitionary prayer and inappropriate sacrifice. In this connection, we may note Maximus' Hellenocentric critiques of the religious practices of the Egyptians, Indians and Persians.

Michael Wakoff, next, turns to an examination of Plotinus' theory and practice of prayer. After dealing briefly with Plotinus' attitude to petitionary prayer, which is largely in line with that of his predecessors, he devotes the bulk of his essay to an evaluation of Plotinus' employment of contemplative prayer, and in particular the role of light and sun imagery in that. Plotinus' work is pervaded with intimations of spiritual exercises, which he encourages his readers to practise, and which he doubtless practised himself. In this connection, Wakoff quotes pertinently the perceptive dictum of Hilary Armstrong that "an important reason why there is so little about prayer in the *Enneads* is that so much of what he writes simply *is* prayer."

Following on this, Andrei Timotin presents a comprehensive account of Porphyry's theory of prayer, developing as it does naturally from that of Plotinus, covering both his critique of lower levels of prayer and sacrifice in such works as his *Letter to Anebo* and *De regressu animae*, and his commendation of a silent and purely intellectual prayer, as in *De abstinentia* and in his *Letter to Marcella*. Timotin points out that the idea of a silent prayer connected to the intellectual contemplation of God was already shaped by Philo of Alexandria and Plotinus, and mirrors the Middle Platonic (e.g. Plutarch's) idea of an intellectual (non-verbal) language of δαίμονες.

Proclus' conception of prayer is thoroughly analysed in three papers by Luc Brisson, Danielle A. Layne and José M. Redondo. Luc Brisson gives a clear and

concise account of it, based mainly on Proclus' commentary on *Timaeus*. In Proclus' view, prayer is a graduated return of the souls to their principle. This conversion is explained by the Neoplatonic doctrine of cyclical procession, according to which in the procession of all beings, they are not completely separated from their primary source (the One) and remain intimately bound to it. Inspired by a theological reading of Plato's *Parmenides*, this process is described with reference to two other authoritative theologies, the *Orphic Rhapsodies* and the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

A certain place is also reserved by Brisson to the five levels of prayer and to the analogy between the prayer of Timaeus and the prayer of Orphic Zeus, but these topics are more extensively addressed by Danielle Layne. Before undertaking his discourse on the production of the sensible world, Timaeus makes a prayer, imitating the similar action of the Demiurge before proceeding to the creation of the world. Layne carefully examines this theory of an intelligible prayer according to which even the Demiurge "prays" in a certain way by turning to the superior causes which attract and convert him to themselves. The five-stage hierarchy of causes displayed in the commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* distinguishes between formal, material and efficient causes. Layne analyses their respective influences on prayer, and tentatively suggests that the five-stage hierarchy of causes mirrors the five-stage hierarchy of prayer itself.

With José Redondo's contribution we leave the Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* and move to other, rather understudied, works of Proclus, preserved only in a fragmentary state, *On the Hieratic Art of the Greeks* and *The Chaldaean Philosophy*. Redondo addresses the topic of the complex overlap between prayer and theurgy, understood specifically as a philosophical *praxis*. He also highlights the astrological dimension of theurgy as it is based on and works through chains of correspondences between the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Specific astrological practices, like the knowledge of the *oikodespotes* (the ruler of the astral figure), could have been used in a theurgical context for different, philosophic-religious purposes, such as the progressive ascent of the soul and its union with the divine.

The last contribution deals with the relation between prayer and silence in late Neoplatonists such as Damascius and Dionysius the Areopagite. Both authors are confronted with the inherent limits of any discourse about a transcendent God. Marilena Vlad shows how, in Damascius' view, to speak about the highest principle (the "Ineffable") requires a prayer for forgiveness and, finally, silence. Beyond it, there would be a different silence, which "surrounds" the highest principle without really belonging to it. On the contrary, Dionysius claims to reach the divine silence through human language and prays not for forgiveness, but for God's help. This claim is based on the assumption that God

revealed the divine names through which he could and should be praised. But these names, as Vlad emphasises it, also spring from silence and turn back to it. For different theological reasons, Damascius and Dionysius seem to agree that the ultimate and most suitable attitude before God is not praying, but keeping silent.

It is to be hoped that this collection of papers will contribute to a better understanding of prayer as one of the core expressions of Platonic religious thought. We are most grateful, in conclusion, to the General Editors, Robert Berchman and John Finamore, for accepting this volume into the series, and for the helpful comments provided by our two anonymous readers, which have made this a significantly better volume, if not yet a perfect one!

The Platonic Philosopher at Prayer

John Dillon

Before leaving the scene of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates, famously, utters a prayer (279b–c), to Pan and 'the other deities of the place' (presumably, in the first place, the nymphs):

> O beloved Pan and all you other gods of this place, grant to me that I be made beautiful as regards all that is within me; and as regards what I have that is external, that it be brought into concord with what is within. May I consider as truly rich the man who is wise; and may I myself have such an abundance of wealth as no one but the man of moderation can carry off.[1]

Let us dwell for a space on the nature of this prayer, as I feel that it has much to tell us about the role of prayer in the Platonic tradition in general. We may ask, first and most basically, is it a real prayer at all?[2] That is, is Socrates seriously appealing to Pan and the Nymphs to grant him these particular blessings, or is he rather proclaiming in this way that he possesses them already? Is this, in other words, a sort of 'programmatic' prayer, of the type that is uttered so often, even today, at the opening of many an official function, in which 'Almighty God', it may be—through the intercession of 'Jesus Christ, our Lord'—is called upon, say, to instil into the hearts of legislators, or other assembled functionaries (the Senate of the University, perhaps?), such virtues as prudence, justice, and patriotism—where in effect the prayer becomes no more than a direct exhortation to those same legislators or functionaries to practise the virtues in question, together with, perhaps, a (hopeful) assertion that they possess these virtues already.

---

1 Ὦ φίλε Πάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῇδε θεοί, δοίητέ μοι καλῷ γενέσθαι τἄνδοθεν· ἔξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναί μοι φίλια. πλούσιον δὲ νομίζοιμι τὸν σοφόν· τὸ δὲ χρυσοῦ πλῆθος εἴη μοι ὅσον μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν δύναιτο ἄλλος ἢ ὁ σώφρων.

2 This, of course, begs the question as to what is 'real' prayer. Much has been written over the years on the psychology of prayer, but I simply take refuge on this occasion in the OED definition: 'a solemn and humble request to God, or to an object of worship; a supplication, petition, or thanksgiving, usually expressed in words.' Certainly the essence of prayer seems to reside in a direct address to a supernatural entity or entities, normally to ask for something, or to render thanks for receiving something.

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Much has been written, both in the more remote past and in recent times, on the vexed question of the religion of Socrates.[3] He was, no doubt, a man of exemplary, if distinctly eccentric, piety, but he was also a man suffused with irony,[4] and this prayer seems to me to derive from the more ironic end of the spectrum of his personality (which is not to say that it does not represent serious aspirations on his part).[5] As such, it serves at least to introduce the question of what the philosopher, and in particular the later Platonist philosopher, can be assumed to be doing when he indulges in prayer.

From Socrates under the plane tree let us turn to two programmatic prayers in Plato's work which were to have a significant influence in the later period, that with which Timaeus begins his cosmological exposition in the *Timaeus* (27c), and the prescriptions on prayer made by the Athenian Stranger in *Laws* VII (801a–b), as between them they seem to determine to a large extent the attitude of philosophers of the Neoplatonic period.

In the *Timaeus*, Timaeus begins as follows, responding to an invitation from Socrates to 'invoke the gods in the customary manner' (καλέσαντα κατὰ νόμον θεούς):

> Nay, as to that, Socrates, all men who possess even a small share of good sense call upon God always at the outset of any undertaking, be it small or great; we therefore who are proposing to deliver a discourse about the universe—how it came into being, or perhaps had no beginning of existence—must, if our senses be not altogether gone astray, invoke gods and goddesses with a prayer that our discourse throughout may be above all pleasing to them, and in consequence satisfactory to us.[6]

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3 I mention, by way of example, the most useful study by McPherran (1996), which contains an excellent account of previous discussions.

4 I see Socrates' irony as a complex phenomenon, layers of irony being interspersed with levels of seriousness in the manner of the skins on an onion, so that one can never be quite sure, in any given instance, whether he is being serious or not—while being convinced that there is a seriousness there, at *some* level.

5 There is a perceptive discussion of this prayer in an article by Clay (1979). See also Rosenmeyer (1982).

6 Plato, *Tim.* 27c: ἀλλ', ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτό γε δὴ πάντες ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ σωφροσύνης μετέχουσιν, ἐπὶ παντὸς ὁρμῇ καὶ σμικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου πράγματος θεὸν ἀεί που καλοῦσιν· ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς περὶ τοῦ παντὸς λόγους ποιεῖσθαί πῃ μέλλοντας, ᾗ γέγονεν ἢ καὶ ἀγενές ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ παντάπασι παραλλάττομεν, ἀνάγκη θεούς τε καὶ θεὰς ἐπικαλουμένους εὔχεσθαι πάντα κατὰ νοῦν ἐκείνοις μὲν μάλιστα, ἑπομένως δὲ ἡμῖν εἰπεῖν. I accept Cornford's interpretation of the phrase ἑπομένως δὲ ἡμῖν, as opposed to the translation 'consistently with ourselves'. So taken, it makes the point that all

The injunction to begin any important enterprise, such as a treatise or commentary, with an invocation to the gods was taken very seriously in later times, as we shall see; but this does not yet address the issue of what the content of prayers should be. Some guidance here is given in the passage of the *Laws*. Here the Stranger is involved in a discussion of the proper nature and subject-matter of musical compositions. After laying down, as a first condition, 'auspicious language' (εὐφημία), he turns to his 'second and third laws':

> What then, next to auspicious language, should be the second law of music? Is it not that prayers should be made on each occasion to those gods to whom offering is made? [Cleinias:] 'Certainly.'
>
> [Stranger:] 'The third law, I suppose, will be this: that poets, knowing that prayers are requests addressed to the gods, must take the utmost care never inadvertently to request an evil under the guise of a good; for if such a prayer were made, it would prove, I fancy, a ludicrous blunder!'.[7]

Any valid prayer, then, must be made with the proviso, 'but God's will be done!' This accords with Socrates' condemnation, in *Rep*. II 364d, of Homer for suggesting, through the mouth of Phoenix in Book IX of the *Iliad* (497), that the will of the gods can be bent by prayer (στρεπτοὶ δέ τε καὶ θεοὶ αὐτοί),[8] and the Athenian Stranger's repudiation of this attitude in *Laws* X 905d–907b. No prayer, then, is to be directed to the gods to gain one any special favour which one has not otherwise earned by the practice of virtue, or to exempt one from any penalty to which one may be liable by reason of one's viciousness or futility.

If we turn now, abruptly, to Plotinus, we can find from his pen, or his lips, scathing condemnations of what one might characterize as the 'popular' attitude to prayer—an attitude fully shared, it must be said, by contemporary Christians, whom he probably has in mind. First, there is his notorious response to his senior disciple Amelius, as reported by Porphyry (*Vita Plot*. 10), when Amelius invited him to accompany him on a sort of temple-crawl, at the festival of the New Moon: 'The gods ought to come to me, not I to them.' 'What he meant

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prayer should be based on an acceptance that our wishes should be conformable to what the gods have ordained for us. This will prove an important philosophical principle in relation to prayer.

7 Plato, *Laws* VII, 801a–b: τίς δὴ μετ' εὐφημίαν δεύτερος ἂν εἴη νόμος μουσικῆς; ἆρ' οὐκ εὐχὰς εἶναι τοῖς θεοῖς οἷς θύομεν ἑκάστοτε; [Κλ.] Πῶς γὰρ οὔ; [Αθ.] Τρίτος δ' οἶμαι νόμος, ὅτι γνόντας δεῖ τοὺς ποιητὰς ὡς εὐχαὶ παρὰ θεῶν αἰτήσεις εἰσίν, δεῖ δὴ τὸν νοῦν αὐτοὺς σφόδρα προσέχειν μή ποτε λάθωσιν κακὸν ὡς ἀγαθὸν αἰτού μενοι· γελοῖον γὰρ δὴ τὸ πάθος οἶμαι τοῦτ' ἂν γίγνοιτο, εὐχῆς τοιαύτης γενομένης.

8 Though substituting for στρεπτοί the rare adjective λιστοί.

by this exalted utterance,' says Porphyry, 'we could not understand, and did not dare to ask.' A possible interpretation, surely, however, is that our relations with the gods should be based, not on our going out of our way to solicit them for favours which we have not made an effort to deserve, but rather on our making ourselves ready, by the practice of spiritual exercises, to receive their power. It is not the expression of an impious or arrogant attitude to the gods; merely a properly Platonist one.[9]

From the treatises themselves, a nice passage occurs in the course of his essay *On Providence* (*Enn.* III 2 [47] 8, 36 ff.)—following on the notably heartless dismissal of soft, fat boys who get their clothes and their lunch-money robbed from them by lean and fit ones, as getting no more than they deserve. We cannot expect the gods to help us, maintains Plotinus, if we are not prepared to help ourselves:[10]

> Here it would not be right for a god to fight in person for the unwarlike. The law[11] says that those who fight bravely, not those who pray (ἀνδριζομένους, ἀλλ' οὐκ εὐχομένους), are to come safe out of wars; for, in just the same way, it is not those who pray but those who look after their land who are to get in a harvest, and those who do not look after their health are not to be healthy; and we are not to be vexed if the bad get larger harvests, or if their farming generally goes better. Then again, it is ridiculous for people to do everything else in life according to their own ideas, even if they are not doing it in the way which the gods like, and then be merely saved by the gods without even doing the things by means of which the gods command them to save themselves.[12]

This is not just a statement of the 'Protestant ethic' of robust self-reliance. It is rather one in support of the position that one should first of all strive to conform

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9 See in this connection the excellent analysis of the incident by Van den Berg (1999).

10 I borrow here the Loeb translation of A.H. Armstrong.

11 This would be something like the Law of Nature; Plotinus is not claiming this as the positive law of any state.

12 Plotinus III 2 [47] 8.36–46: Ἔνθα οὐ θεὸν ἔδει ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀπολέμων αὐτὸν μάχεσθαι· σῴζεσθαι γὰρ ἐκ πολέμων φησὶ δεῖν ὁ νόμος ἀνδριζομένους, ἀλλ' οὐκ εὐχομένους· οὐδὲ γὰρ κομίζεσθαι καρποὺς εὐχομένους ἀλλὰ γῆς ἐπιμελουμένους, οὐδέ γε ὑγιαίνειν μὴ ὑγείας ἐπιμελουμένους· οὐδ' ἀγανακτεῖν δέ, εἰ τοῖς φαύλοις πλείους γίνοιντο καρποὶ ἢ ὅλως αὐτοῖς γεωργοῦσιν εἴη ἄμεινον. Ἔπειτα γελοῖον τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν βίον γνώμῃ τῇ ἑαυτῶν πράττειν, κἂν μὴ ταύτῃ πράττωσιν, ᾗ θεοῖς φίλα, σῴζεσθαι δὲ μόνον παρὰ θεῶν οὐδὲ ταῦτα ποιήσαντας, δι' ὧν κελεύουσιν αὐτοὺς οἱ θεοὶ σῴζεσθαι.

one's own will to that of the gods, and to accept the order of the universe; only then will correct forms of prayer ensue.

But if prayer in the 'vulgar' sense attracts Plotinus' contempt, is there any activity which could be described as 'prayer' that he would admit to practising? John Rist has a useful chapter on Prayer (chapter 15) in *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*,[13] where he draws attention to several important passages. One of these is the latter part of *Ennead* IV 4 [28] chs. 26–45, where, in the process of discussing the type of consciousness enjoyed by the souls of the heavenly bodies (which he, of course, regarded as divine), Plotinus has occasion to make various remarks on prayer, indicating in the process that he sees a place for it in the philosophic life.

The first thing that he wishes to establish, however, is that the heavenly gods cannot be expected to deviate from their fixed purposes by reason of our prayers (ibid. 26). Prayer, rather, works by establishing a linkage (through cosmic *sympatheia*) between us and them: "Their knowledge of prayers is the result of a sort of linking and a particular disposition of things fitted into the whole, and the same applies to their accomplishment of what we pray for".[14] Plotinus subjoins to this the interesting remark that the spells of the magicians work in just the same way, by making use of *sympatheia*, indicating that the influences of the heavenly beings are value-free: if you press the right buttons, so to speak, they will respond, whatever your purposes.

He returns to this topic in chapter 30, still concerned about the problem of the extent to which the heavenly gods 'answer' our prayers (1–17):

> But now, since we established that memory in the heavenly beings was unnecessary,[15] but gave them perceptions, and hearing as well as sight, and said that they heard the prayers which we make to the sun,[16] and other men to the stars, and since it is believed that the heavenly beings accomplish many things for men, and do so in such a casual way that they are not only helpers in right actions, but in many wrong actions too, we must enquire into these questions, since they have come up—

13 Rist (1967), 199–212. I am indebted also to the useful discussion of Laurent (1999).

14 Plotinus IV 4 [28] 26.1–2: Γίνονται δὲ εὐχῶν γνώσεις κατὰ οἷον σύναψιν καὶ κατὰ τοιάνδε σχέσιν ἐναρμοζομένων, καὶ αἱ ποιήσεις οὕτως. I borrow the translation of A.H. Armstrong.

15 This is one of Plotinus' main contentions in relation to the mode of consciousness of the heavenly gods, by reason of the fact that their world does not have any aspect of pastness. Cf. IV 4 [28] 4.6–8 above.

16 That is to say, we Platonists; useful incidental evidence that Plotinus did observe traditional Platonist practices, whatever sense he accorded them.

> for there are very great difficulties about them in themselves, and these are much talked about by those who dislike the idea that gods should be culpable accomplices in improper behaviour, especially in love-affairs and immoral liaisons—for these reasons, and particularly about what we were discussing at the beginning, the question of their possessing memory. For it is obvious that, when we pray, they act, and do not do it at once, but afterwards, and very often after a long delay, they possess memory of the prayers which mortals offer to them.[17]

This, however, as Plotinus notes, would run counter to his previous argument. He does not want to dispute that consequences do follow upon prayer, even at some distance in time, but, as emerges over the next few chapters, he wants to explain such phenomena as the natural results of cosmic sympathy of the universe being all one vast body—and these influences work for evil-minded magicians, if they are good at their art, just as well as for high-minded Platonist philosophers. We may check in again towards the end of chapter 40, where a rather disquieting connection is being made between the power of prayer and that of magical spells, and even with pitiful scenes on the dramatic stage:

> There is a natural drawing power in spells, brought about by the tune and the particular intonation and posture of the magician—for these things have an attractive force, even as do pitiful postures and voices;[18] for it is the irrational soul—not the power of choice or reason—which is charmed by music, and this kind of magic occasions no surprise: people

17 Plotinus IV 4 [28] 30.1–17: Νῦν δ' ἐπειδὴ μνήμας μὲν ἐν τοῖς ἄστροις περιττὰς εἶναι ἐθέμεθα, αἰσθήσεις δὲ ἔδομεν καὶ ἀκούσεις πρὸς ταῖς ὁράσεσι καὶ εὐχῶν δὴ κλύοντας ἔφαμεν, ἃς πρὸς ἥλιον ποιούμεθα καὶ δὴ καὶ πρὸς ἄστρα ἄλλοι τινὲς ἄνθρωποι, καὶ πεπίστευται, ὡς δι' αὐτῶν αὐτοῖς πολλὰ καὶ τελεῖται καὶ δὴ καὶ οὕτω ῥᾳστα, ὡς μὴ μόνον πρὸς τὰ δίκαια τῶν ἔργων συλλήπτορας εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀδίκων, τούτων τε πέρι παραπεπτωκότων ζητητέον—ἔχει γὰρ καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὰ μεγίστας καὶ πολυθρυλλήτους παρὰ τοῖς δυσχεραίνουσιν ἀπορίας, θεοὺς συνεργοὺς καὶ αἰτίους γίγνεσθαι ἀτόπων ἔργων, τῶν τε ἄλλων καὶ δὴ καὶ πρὸς ἔρωτας καὶ ἀκολάστους συλλήψεις—τούτων τε οὖν εἵνεκα καὶ μάλιστα περὶ οὗ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ λόγος, τῆς μνήμης αὐτῶν. Δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι, εἰ εὐξαμένων ποιοῦσι καὶ οὐ παραχρῆμα δρῶσιν αὐτά, ἀλλ' εἰς ὕστερον καὶ πάνυ πολλάκις εἰς χρόνους, μνήμην ὧν εὔχονται ἄνθρωποι πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἔχουσιν.

18 It is not quite clear to me what Plotinus has in mind here—probably dramatic performances, but possibly pitiful appeals from defendants in court. In either case, the comparison seems somewhat inappropriate. It is Plotinus' contention, after all, that both the magician and the philosopher are not so much appealing to anyone's irrational soul as tuning in to a natural force in the universe—which is admittedly not conscious, in the sense of being driven by *prohairesis* or *logos*, but not exactly *irrational* either.

> actually take pleasure in being enchanted, even if this is not actually what they demand from artists. And we must not imagine that prayers in general[19] either are responded to by a faculty of conscious choice (προαίρεσις): for people charmed by spells do not act on the basis of choice, any more than, when a snake fascinates men, does one who is fascinated understand or perceive what is happening, but he realises only afterwards that he has had the experience; his ruling intellect (τὸ ἡγούμενόν), however, remains unaffected. When a man prays, then, to a heavenly being, some influence comes from it upon him or upon another person, (41) but that being itself, sun or star, has no consciousness of it at all. The prayer is answered because one part is in sympathetic connection with another, just as in one tense string; for if the string is plucked at the lower end, it has a vibration at the upper.[20]

All this, it must be said, is less than complimentary to the heavenly gods. One can hardly imagine that King Helios, for instance, would be well pleased to be compared to some wretched mortal fascinated by a snake. The truth is that Plotinus' regard for the prowess of the heavenly beings is not very high. They have power over the lower soul, and over the irrational processes of the physical universe, and even vulgar magicians, if they are reasonably competent, can make use of them at that level. But they do not have power over the rational soul of the philosopher, and it is with his rational soul that Plotinus conducts his most serious form of prayer.

To whom, then, does he pray, at this level? Or rather, what activity of his may correspond to what might vulgarly be termed 'prayer'? To answer that, we must take into consideration certain activities that would not be comprehended by the concept of prayer at the 'vulgar' level, but which much certainly be included in the Neoplatonic concept, and specifically 'contemplation' (*theôria*) in all

19 Sc. other than magical spells.

20 Plotinus IV 4 [28] 40.19–41.4: Πέφυκε δὲ καὶ ἐπῳδαῖς τῷ μέλει καὶ τῇ τοιᾷδε ἠχῇ καὶ τῷ σχήματι τοῦ δρῶντος· ἕλκει γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα, οἷον τὰ ἐλεεινὰ σχήματα καὶ φθέγματα. [Ἀλλ' ἡ ψυχή] Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ προαίρεσις οὐδ' ὁ λόγος ὑπὸ μουσικῆς θέλγεται, ἀλλ' ἡ ἄλογος ψυχή, καὶ οὐ θαυμάζεται ἡ γοητεία ἡ τοιαύτη· καίτοι φιλοῦσι κηλούμενοι, κἂν μὴ τοῦτο αἰτῶνται παρὰ τῶν τῇ μουσικῇ χρωμένων. Καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δὲ εὐχὰς οὐ τῆς προαιρέσεως ἀκουούσης οἰητέον· οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ θελγόμενοι ταῖς ἐπῳδαῖς οὕτως, οὐδ' ὅταν γοητεύῃ ὅφις ἀνθρώπους, σύνεσιν ὁ γοητευόμενος ἔχει, οὐδ' αἰσθάνεται, ἀλλὰ γινώσκει, ἤδη παθών, ὅτι πέπονθεν, ἀπαθὲς δ' αὐτῷ τὸ ἡγούμενόν ἐστιν. Ὧι δ' ηὔξατο, ἦλθέ τι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξ ἐκείνου ἢ πρὸς ἄλλον. Ὁ δὲ ἥλιος ἢ ἄλλο ἄστρον οὐκ ἐπαίει. Καὶ γίνεται τὸ κατὰ τὴν εὐχὴν συμπαθοῦς μέρους μέρει γενομένου, ὥσπερ ἐν μιᾷ νευρᾷ τεταμένῃ· κινηθεῖσα γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ κάτω καὶ ἄνω ἔχει τὴν κίνησιν.

its forms. It is generally accepted that Plotinus indulged in various forms of meditation (though he himself is never very specific about this), by virtue of which he united his intellect quite regularly to the intelligible realm,[21] and even possibly—if that is what the famous 'four occasions' of which Porphyry speaks in the *Life* (chapter 23)—to the One itself. It would seem that, in this connection, Plotinus made use of what have been identified as 'spiritual exercises'. Porphyry speaks of the method of ascent set out in the *Symposium* (210a–212a), but Plotinus may not have confined himself to that. We seem to have an excellent example of his strategy set out, by way of an exhortation to the reader, at *Enn*. V 8 [31] 9.1–15:[22]

> Let us then make a mental picture of our universe: each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; yet all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity,[23] so that whatever comes into view, say the outer orb of the heavens, shall bring immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the sun and of all the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe.
>
> Bring this vision actually before your sight, so that there shall be in your mind the gleaming representation (φωτεινή τις φαντασία) of a sphere, a picture holding all the things of the universe moving or in repose, or (as in reality) some at rest, some in motion. Keep this sphere before you, and from it imagine another, a sphere stripped of magnitude and spatial differences; cast out your inborn sense (φάντασμα) of Matter, taking care not merely to attenuate it. Call on God, maker of the sphere whose image you now hold and pray him to enter. And may he come bringing his own universe with all the gods that dwell in it—he who is the one God and all the gods, where each is all, blending into a unity, distinct in powers but all one god in virtue of that divine power of many facets.[24]

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21 That, I think, is what Porphyry probably means by ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ἐπέκεινα θεός in *Vita Plot*. 23, rather than the One, since Plotinus 'often raised himself in thought' to this level, but the 'four occasions' specified here seem to be something more special. Porphyry speaks here of Plotinus using 'the method Plato teaches in the *Symposium*'—some form of which would indeed be an obvious way to proceed for a Platonist.

22 I borrow here the translation of Stephen MacKenna, which has a nobler ring to it than Armstrong's.

23 Plotinus here employs his favourite Anaxagorean tag, 'ὁμοῦ πάντα', which he normally uses to characterize the intelligible realm. This would indicate that he is seeking to create a *phantasia* of the intelligible archetype of the physical world.

24 Plotinus V 8 [31] 9.1–15: Τοῦτον τοίνυν τὸν κόσμον, ἑκάστου τῶν μερῶν μένον τος ὅ ἐστι καὶ μὴ

There are indeed a number of other fine images of this sort scattered throughout the *Enneads*,[25] but this one is particularly notable, as it explicitly combines the conjuring up of the image with prayer. I would suggest that the prayer envisaged here is really nothing other than the concentration on the image itself, and so a form of meditation, which itself provokes the presence of the god. No form of words is necessarily involved.[26]

If that be so, then I think we are at the core of the dispute between the 'theurgical' and 'theoretical' tendencies within later Neoplatonism, as represented by Iamblichus on the one hand, and Plotinus and Porphyry on the other—with the Athenian School of Syrianus and Proclus feeling that they combined the best of both traditions. Iamblichus criticizes his immediate predecessors rather forcefully in the *De Mysteriis*, Book II 11 (96–97) for imagining that mental concentration alone could unite a mortal with the gods:

> It is not thought that links the theurgists to the gods: otherwise what should hinder those who philosophize by means of contemplation alone from enjoying theurgic union with the gods? The case is not so. Theurgic union is attained only by the perfective operation of ineffable acts correctly performed, acts which are beyond all understanding;

συγχεομένου, λάβωμεν τῇ διανοίᾳ, εἰς ἓν ὁμοῦ πάντα, ὡς οἷόν τε, ὥστε ἑνὸς ὁτουοῦν προφαινομένου, οἷον τῆς ἔξω σφαίρας οὔσης, ἀκολουθεῖν εὐθὺς καὶ τὴν ἡλίου καὶ ὁμοῦ τῶν ἄλλων ἄστρων τὴν φαντασίαν, καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ζῷα ὁρᾶσθαι, οἷον ἐπὶ σφαίρας διαφανοῦς καὶ ἔργῳ ἂν γένοιτο πάντα ἑνορᾶσθαι. Ἔστω οὖν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φωτεινή τις φαντασία σφαίρας ἔχουσα πάντα ἐν αὐτῇ, εἴτε κινούμενα εἴτε ἑστηκότα, ἢ τὰ μὲν κινούμενα, τὰ δ' ἑστηκότα. Φυλάττων δὲ ταύτην ἄλλην παρὰ σαυτῷ ἀφελὼν τὸν ὄγκον λάβε· ἄφελε δὲ καὶ τοὺς τόπους καὶ τὸ τῆς ὕλης ἐν σοὶ φάντασμα, καὶ μὴ πειρῶ αὐτῆς ἄλλην σμικροτέραν λαβεῖν τῷ ὄγκῳ, θεὸν δὲ καλέσας τὸν πεποιηκότα ἧς ἔχεις τὸ φάντασμα εὖξαι ἐλθεῖν. Ὁ δὲ ἥκοι τὸν αὐτοῦ κόσμον φέρων μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ θεῶν εἷς ὢν καὶ πάντες, καὶ ἕκαστος πάντες συνόντες εἰς ἕν, καὶ ταῖς μὲν δυνάμεσιν ἄλλοι, τῇ δὲ μιᾷ ἐκείνῃ τῇ πολλῇ πάντες εἷς.

25 E.g. the two fine images in VI 4 [22] 7, the hand carrying the plank ('think away the hand'), and the central flame illuminating a globe ('think away the flame'), both serving as images for the way in which the immaterial can be present to the material; but in neither of these cases is prayer explicitly involved. The image of the universe pervaded by soul in V 1 [10] 2 is another example.

26 The clearest indication of this sort of prayer in Plotinus' works is probably the notable passage in V 1 [10] 6.8 ff., à propos acquiring an intuition of the One: "Let us speak of it in this way, first invoking God himself, *not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him* (οὐ λόγῳ γεγωνῷ, ἀλλὰ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκτείνασιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον), able to pray in this way alone to him alone".

> and by the power of the unutterable symbols which are intelligible only to the gods.[27]

This may serve as a lead-in to a study of Iamblichus' own theory of prayer, as enunciated in Book V of the *De Mysteriis* (26.237–240). He is discussing prayer here in the context of performing sacrifice—very suitably to a theurgist:

> Since by no means the least part of sacrificial procedure is that of prayers, and indeed prayers serve to confer the highest degree of completeness upon sacrifices, and as it is by means of them that the whole efficacy of sacrifices is reinforced and brought to perfection, and a joint contribution is made to cult, and an indissoluble hieratic communion is created with the gods, it will be no harm to say a few words on that subject. In fact, it is a worthy subject of study in itself, as well as rendering our knowledge of the gods more perfect.
>
> I declare, then that the first degree of prayer is the introductory (συναγωγός), which leads to contact and acquaintance with the divine; the second is conjunctive, producing a union of sympathetic minds (κοινωνίας ὁμονοητικῆς συνδετικός), and calling forth benefactions sent down from the gods even before we express our requests, while achieving whole courses of action even before we think of them; the most perfect, finally, has as its mark ineffable unification (ἄρρητος ἕνωσις), which establishes all authority in the gods, and provides that our souls rest completely in them.
>
> According to the distinction of these three levels, then, which measure out the whole range of interaction with the divine (τὰ θεῖα), prayer establishes links of friendship between us and the gods, and secures for us the triple advantage which we gain from the gods through theurgy, the first leading to illumination (ἐπίλαμψις), the second to the common achievement of projects (κοινὴ ἀπεργασία), and the third to the perfect fulfilment of the soul through fire (τελεία ἀποπλήρωσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός).[28] Sometimes it precedes sacrifices, sometimes, again, it comes in the middle of theurgic activity, and at other times it brings sacrifices to a suitable conclusion;

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27 Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* II 11, 96.11–97.2: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ ἔννοια συνάπτει τοῖς θεοῖς τοὺς θεουργούς· ἐπεὶ τί ἐκώλυε τοὺς θεωρητικῶς φιλοσοφοῦντας ἔχειν τὴν θεουργικὴν ἕνωσιν πρὸς τοὺς θεούς; νῦν δ' οὐκ ἔχει τό γε ἀληθὲς οὕτως· ἀλλ' ἡ τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἀρρήτων καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν νόησιν θεοπρεπῶς ἐνεργουμένων τελεσιουργία ἥ τε τῶν νοουμένων τοῖς θεοῖς μόνον συμβόλων ἀφθέγκτων δύναμις ἐντίθησι τὴν θεουργικὴν ἕνωσιν.

28 That is to say, fire in the 'Chaldaean' sense, the immaterial 'fire' of divine power.

but no sacred act can take place without the supplications contained in prayers. Extended practice of prayer nurtures our intellect, enlarges very greatly our soul's receptivity (ὑποδοχή) to the gods, reveals to men the life of the gods, accustoms their eyes to the brightness of divine light, and gradually brings to perfection the capacity of our faculties for contact with the gods, until it leads us up to the highest level of consciousness of which we are capable; also, it elevates gently the dispositions of our minds,[29] and communicates to us those of the gods, stimulates persuasion and communion and indissoluble friendship, augments divine love, kindles the divine element in the soul, scours away all contrary tendencies within it, casts out from the aetherial and luminous vehicle[30] surrounding the soul everything that tends to generation, brings to perfection good hope and faith concerning the light;[31] and, in a word, it renders those who employ prayers, if we may so express it, the familiar consorts of the gods (ὁμιληταὶ τῶν θεῶν).[32]

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29 This phrase, τὰ τῆς διανοίας ἤθη, is somewhat odd, but may refer to something like the intellectual virtues of the soul.

30 That is, the pneumatic vehicle. For Iamblichus' doctrine on the vehicle, in which he is at odds with Porphyry, see Finamore (1985). The history of the concept of the pneumatic vehicle has been well set out by Dodds (1963), in Appendix II 313 ff.

31 This mention of 'hope' (*elpis*) and 'faith' (*pistis*), together with that of 'love' (*erôs*) just above, completes the enumeration of the Chaldaean triad of virtues (cf. Psellus, *Hypotyposis*, 74.28 Kroll, 199 Des Places, and Proclus, *In Tim.* I 212.19 ff.; *in Alc.* 51.15 f. Cr.).

32 Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* V 26, 237.6–239.10: Ἐπεὶ δὲ μέρος τῶν θυσιῶν οὐ τὸ σμικρότατόν ἐστι τὸ τῶν εὐχῶν, συμπληροῖ τε αὐτὰς ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα, καὶ διὰ τούτων κρατύνεται αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπιτελεῖται τὸ πᾶν ἔργον, κοινήν τε συντέλειαν ποιεῖται πρὸς τὴν θρησκείαν, καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν ἀδιάλυτον ἐμπλέκει τὴν ἱερατικὴν πρὸς τοὺς θεούς, οὐ χεῖρον καὶ περὶ ταύτης ὀλίγα διελθεῖν· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ τοῦτο ἄξιόν ἐστι μαθήσεως, καὶ τὴν περὶ θεῶν ἐπιστήμην τελειοτέραν ἀπεργάζεται. Φημὶ δὴ οὖν ὡς τὸ μὲν πρῶτον τῆς εὐχῆς εἶδός ἐστι συναγωγόν, συναφῆς τε τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον καὶ γνωρίσεως ἐξηγούμενον· τὸ δ' ἐπὶ τούτῳ κοινωνίας ὁμονοητικῆς συνδετικόν, δόσεις τε προκαλούμενον τὰς ἐκ θεῶν καταπεμπομένας πρὸ τοῦ λόγου, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ νοῆσαι τὰ ὅλα ἔργα ἐπιτελούσας· τὸ δὲ τελεώτατον αὐτῆς ἡ ἄρρητος ἕνωσις ἐπισφραγίζεται, τὸ πᾶν κῦρος ἐνιδρύουσα τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ τελέως ἐν αὐτοῖς κεῖσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν παρέχουσα. Ἐν τρισὶ δὲ τούτοις ὅροις, ἐν οἷς τὰ θεῖα πάντα μετρεῖται, τὴν πρὸς θεοὺς ἡμῶν φιλίαν συναρμόσασα καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν ἱερατικὸν ὄφελος τριπλοῦν ἐνδίδωσι, τὸ μὲν εἰς ἐπίλαμψιν τεῖνον, τὸ δὲ εἰς κοινὴν ἀπεργασίαν, τὸ δὲ εἰς τὴν τελείαν ἀποπλήρωσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν προηγεῖται τῶν θυσιῶν, ποτὲ δ' αὖ μεταξὺ διαλαμβάνει τὴν ἱερουργίαν, ἄλλοτε δ' αὖ τὸ τέλος τῶν θυσιῶν ἀποπληροῖ· ἔργον τε οὐδὲν ἱερατι κὸν ἄνευ τῶν ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἱκετειῶν γίγνεται. Ἡ δ' ἐν αὐταῖς ἐγχρονίζουσα διατριβὴ τρέφει μὲν τὸν ἡμέτερον νοῦν, τὴν δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς ὑποδοχὴν τῶν θεῶν ποιεῖ λίαν εὐρυτέραν, ἀνοίγει δὲ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ τῶν θεῶν συνήθειαν δὲ παρέχει πρὸς τὰς τοῦ φωτὸς μαρμαρυγάς, κατὰ βραχὺ δὲ τελειοῖ τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν πρὸς τὰς τῶν θεῶν συναφάς, ἕως ἂν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀκρότατον ἡμᾶς

The subject of this passage, it must be admitted, is not really prayer in the traditional sense, but rather theurgic prayer, which was doubtless not very different from the formulae prescribed in the magical papyri, including the use of magical names, sacred words, and even strings of vowels. What we find here is a system of three stages of prayer, leading the theurgist progressively upwards to his goal. Iamblichus provides quasi-technical terms for each of the three stages, but even so the exact distinctions are not very clear. The first stage, at least, which we may term the synagôgic, produces only preliminary acquaintance—establishes a line of communication, one might say. If we may adduce here the interpretation given by Proclus, in his *Timaeus Commentary*;[33] of what he declares to be Iamblichus' doctrine of prayer in his *Timaeus Commentary* (which seems to have been not very different from that laid down in the *De Mysteriis*),[34] we can conclude that this preliminary stage involved the acquisition of 'knowledge (*gnôsis*) of all the divine orders', in virtue of which one becomes acquainted with the distinctive characteristics (*idiotêtes*) of each, and thus presumably grasps the correct mode of approach to whichever god one is interested in. It is this, says Proclus (211.11–13), that is described by the *Chaldaean Oracles* as 'the fire-warmed thought' (ἡ πυριθαλπὴς ἔννοια = Fr. 139 Des Places)—presumably because this sort of insight into the natures of the gods is inspired by the Divine Fire itself.

The second stage, the syndetic, is declared to link us to the divine by sympathetic association (κοινωνία ὁμονοητική), "calling forth gifts from the gods even before we express our requests." This results in cooperative actions, leading to

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ἐπαναγάγῃ, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἡμέτερα τῆς διανοίας ἤθη ἠρέμα ἀνέλκει, τὰ δὲ τῶν θεῶν ἡμῖν ἐκδίδωσι, πειθὼ δὲ καὶ κοινωνίαν καὶ φιλίαν ἀδιάλυτον ἐγείρει, τόν τε θεῖον ἔρωτα συναύξει, καὶ τὸ θεῖον τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνάπτει, ἀποκαθαίρει τε πᾶν τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ ἀπορρίπτει τοῦ αἰθερώδους καὶ αὐγοειδοῦς πνεύματος περὶ αὐτὴν ὅσον ἐστὶ γενεσιουργόν, ἐλπίδα τε ἀγαθὴν καὶ τὴν περὶ τὸ φῶς πίστιν τελειοῖ, καὶ τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν, ὁμιλητὰς τῶν θεῶν, ἵνα οὕτως εἴπωμεν, τοὺς χρωμένους αὐταῖς ἀπεργάζεται.

33 *In Tim.* I 209.1–212.28, in the course of a more general, and most valuable, discourse on prayer, 207.21–214.12, which includes also an account of Porphyry's doctrine (207.23–209.1), which is then criticised by Iamblichus. Proclus also includes here, by the way, a memorable dictum of Iamblichus' pupil, Theodorus of Asine, 'all things pray except the First' (πάντα γὰρ εὔχεται πλὴν τοῦ πρώτου, 213.2–3 = Test. 7 Deuse).

34 We do have the difference that in Proclus' account there are not three, but five stages of prayer. It is not clear whether this innovation is Proclus' own, or developed already by Iamblichus. The latter alternative, however, is quite possible, since the three middle stages can be regarded, as we shall see, simply as an elaboration of the second stage set out in the *De Mysteriis*. This would be quite a plausible development for Iamblichus himself to indulge in, when writing *in propria persona*, instead of as a senior Egyptian priest.

the conferral of benefits. In Proclus' elaboration of this (*In Tim.* I 211.13ff.), we find a sequence of three stages, denominated respectively *oikeiôsis* ('assimilation'), 'through which we establish likeness (ὁμοίωσις) to the divine, in respect of purity, holiness, education and order, in virtue of which we can bring our concerns into conjunction with the gods (δι' ἧς τὰ ἡμέτερα προσάγομεν τοῖς θεοῖς);[35] drawing down their goodwill, and subjecting our souls to their control'; *synaphê* ('linkage'), 'in virtue of which we lay hold of the divine essence with the summit[36] of our soul, and converge upon it' (καθ' ἣν ἐφαπτόμεθα τῆς θείας οὐσίας τῷ ἀκροτάτῳ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ συννεύομεν πρὸς αὐτήν); and thirdly *empelasis* ('approach'),[37] which, it seems, 'increases the closeness of association (κοινωνία) and makes clearer our participation in the light of the gods'.

There may well seem to us here to be a distinction without a difference between these latter three stages, and such an impression would, I feel, be not far from the truth, but it may conceivably reflect some psychological manifestations observed by either Iamblichus or Proclus; at any rate, all three seem to represent the stage described as *synaphê* in the *De Mysteriis*.

From this experience of ever-increasing linkage, one rises to the third level of prayer described in the *De Mysteriis*, or the fifth in the *Timaeus Commentary* in either case denominated *henôsis*,[38] involving some type of mystical union (such as we have seen Plotinus being credited by Porphyry with having attained on the famous four occasions, in *Vita Plot.* 23). Iamblichus describes this as a complete surrender of the personality of the worshipper to the gods (cf. τὸ πᾶν κῦρος ἐνιδρύουσα τοῖς θεοῖς), while Proclus speaks of 'establishing the One of the soul in the actual One of the gods, and making our activity (ἐνέργεια) one with that of the gods' (211.25–26), the result being that we are no longer in our own control, but subject to that of the gods, coming to rest in 'the divine light'.

We have here, I think it is fair to say, a pretty explicit description of a psychological process central to the spiritual life of the later Neoplatonists, if we

35 One might wonder what is covered precisely by τὰ ἡμέτερα: our concerns merely, or perhaps our very nature?

36 The term used here, τὸ ἀκρότατον τῆς ψυχῆς, could be taken to refer to the 'One' of the soul, but probably does not, since that comes later, as we shall see; the alternative is that it refers merely to the intellectual element.

37 This term is derived by Proclus (or Iamblichus?) from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, as Proclus makes clear by quoting Fr. 21 Des Places: τῷ πυρὶ γὰρ βρότος ἐμπελάσας φάος ἕξει.

38 Ἡ ἄρρητος ἕνωσις in the *De Mysteriis* (238.4); ἕνωσις in *In Tim.* (211.24); in either case the verb ἐνιδρύω is used, to describe the blending of the mystical element in our soul (the One in us) with the gods.

could only arrive at a correct interpretation of the terminology being employed. What I am interested in on this occasion, after all, is not a study of the surviving prayers or hymns of any of these men, interesting though they are, but in the much more troublesome and intangible question of what may have been the subjective experience behind, and transcending, these prayers. What I would suggest is that anything in the way of traditional prayerful utterance, such as we find, for instance, at the beginning of Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary*, or in the preface to his *Platonic Theology*, can only relate to the lowest stage of prayer set out in the passages we have been examining—or possibly, stretching a point, to the middle stage or stages; they can have nothing to do with *henôsis*—or even, I think, with *empelasis*.

The same must be true, I think, of the hymns of Proclus, on the status of which as prayers Dr. R.M. Van den Berg has a most useful discussion in his excellent study of them.[39] As he shows, efforts of previous commentators to connect one or other of the hymns to the various stages of prayer set out in the *Timaeus Commentary* are quite futile; they must all be regarded as relating to the lower stages only. The higher stages of Neoplatonic prayer, I would insist, transcend language altogether; and even the median stages, at least of theurgic prayer, would involve, rather than traditional prayerful utterances, meaningless strings of 'divine' language, or even sequences of vowels, such as are discussed by Iamblichus in the latter part of Book VII of the *De Mysteriis* (chs. 4–5), and such as we can find employed extensively in the magical papyri. So what then went on at the higher stages of Platonist prayer? The short answer is that, in the nature of the case, there is not much that we can know about this. It is an aspect of the Platonist experience than can only be performed, not talked about. But there are, I think, a few clues. One is contained in the repeated references, often connected with the *Chaldaean Oracles*, to 'fire' and 'light'. If we recognise that we are dealing here with techniques of transcendental meditation, leading ultimately to states of ecstasy where the conscious personality is negated, and subsumed into some kind of cosmic unity, we must reckon with a series of spiritual exercises based on the contemplation of images of light. I have tried to practise this sort of thing myself on occasion, though with fairly modest success. The most difficult aspect of the exercise is to rid the mind of all extraneous, formulable thoughts, and to focus the attention entirely on the light-source. Then one must imagine oneself progressively drawn into the light-source, as into the orb of the sun. This is what Iamblichus describes as *epilampsis*, or, in stronger terms, τελεία ἀποπλήρωσις ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός, 'total

39 Van den Berg (2001), ch. 5.

saturation (of the soul) by the Fire' (238.11), and Proclus as ἐν τῷ θείῳ φωτὶ μένειν καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ περιέχεσθαι, 'coming to rest in the divine Fire and being entirely enveloped by it' (211.27–28). The chanting of meaningless invocations, of the *Om mane padme om* type, is certainly a help to achieving this union with the light-source. Of course, there is a lot more to it than that: the development of correct breathing techniques, and the adoption of a suitably ascetic life-style, are of some importance as well, and I can't claim to have got very far in those areas, but the exercise of imaging light is plainly of central importance, and it has nothing to do with the utterance of traditional prayers. Another important feature is plainly the willingness to subordinate one's will to the course of universal providence—presumably what is meant by Proclus' striking term 'ὑποκατακλίνειν our souls to the gods' (211.12)—a metaphor borrowed from the surrender of a wrestler to his opponent. Iamblichus in the *De Mysteriis*, it must be said, is less humble, speaking rather of total cooperation between the theurgist and the gods, but certainly envisaging subordination to their will. In either case, though—in strong contrast to the total abasement before the deity of such a pious Christian as Augustine—the theurgist does envisage being able to gain the cooperation of the gods for the fulfilment of his purposes, always assuming that these purposes are in accordance with divine providence.[40]

Perhaps the most explicit and informative account of the higher levels of Neoplatonic prayer is to be found in the extracts from Proclus' *Chaldaean Philosophy*, probably preserved for us by Michael Psellus.[41] Here we find repeated references to raising oneself up into the light, or the fire, of the divine realm, this being described as a 'hymn to the Father'. At various points in *Extracts* 1 and 2 for example, we find significant statements such as the following:

40 In this connection, I draw attention to a most useful essay by Erler (2001), pointing to the significant influence of Epicurean, and more especially Stoic attitudes to the deity on the attitude of later Platonists to the purpose of prayer. Once one accepts that God cannot be swayed from his purposes—a position already asserted by Plato in *Laws* X, after all—the only valid role of prayer for a philosopher can be self-improvement through the purification of the mind, and that is certainly what the Neoplatonists are engaged in—though as theurgists they also aspire to taking a hand in the administration of the universe themselves, in full cooperation with the gods!

41 Published first by Pitra (1888) and Jahn (1891), but now most conveniently available in Des Places (1971), 205–212. Here Proclus is overtly expounding the doctrine of the Oracles, but there is no question but that he endorses it entirely. I am much indebted to Bert van den Berg for reminding me of this text.

> How does the cohort of angels lead the soul upwards? By 'lighting the soul with fire' (φέγγουσα πυρὶ τὴν ψυχήν), says the Oracle, that is, by illuminating it all about, and making it to be full of pure fire, which grants it undeviating order (τάξις ἄκλιτος), and a power by virtue of which it does not go whirring off into the disorder of matter, but unites itself to the light of the divine.[42]

And a little later:

> The ultimate aim of ascent is participation in the fruits of divinity and self-illuminating fulfilment with fire (ἡ αὐτοφανὴς τοῦ πυρὸς ἀποπλήρωσις), which is the vision of God (ὄψις τοῦ θεοῦ),[43] because it places the soul under the eyes of God. The soul is rendered apt to hymn the divine (ὑμνῳδὸς τῶν θείων), as the Oracle says, setting forth the ineffable symbols of the Father and presenting them to the Father, those symbols which the Father has implanted in it in its first entry into existence. For such are the intellectual and invisible hymns of the ascending soul, stirring up the memory of harmonious reason-principles which bear ineffable images of the divine powers within it.[44]

From these passages, I think, we can derive an impression of a type of 'prayer' or 'hymn' which totally transcends words, and which seems chiefly to involve a process of thinking oneself into union with a fiery light-source. This impression is strengthened in the following passages from *Extract* 2:

> The Hymn to the Father does not consist of articulated discourses (λόγοι σύνθετοι), nor yet of the performance of rituals (ἔργων κατασκευή); for he,

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42 Proclus, *Eclogae de philosophia Chaldaica*, fr. 1, ed. Des Places (1971), 206.6–11: ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων μερὶς πῶς ἀνάγει ψυχήν; φέγγουσα, φησί, πυρὶ τὴν ψυχήν, τοῦτ' ἔστι περιλάμπουσα αὐτὴν πανταχόθεν, καὶ πλήρη ποιοῦσα τοῦ ἀχράντου πυρὸς ὃ ἐνδίδωσιν αὐτῇ τάξιν ἄκλιτον καὶ δύναμιν δι' ἣν οὐκ ἐκροιζεῖται εἰς τὴν ὑλικὴν ἀταξίαν ἀλλὰ συνάπτεται τῷ φωτὶ τῶν θείων.

43 This seems to be ὄψις in its active sense, meaning 'God's vision', rather than the soul's vision of God—though the soul necessarily enjoys a vision of divine fire also.

44 Proclus, *Eclogae de philosophia Chaldaica*, fr. 1, ed. Des Places (1971), 206.17–207.2: Τέλος δὲ τῶν ἀνόδων ἡ μετουσία τῶν θείων καρπῶν καὶ ἡ αὐτοφανὴς τοῦ πυρὸς ἀποπλήρωσις, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἡ θεοῦ ὄψις, ὡς ὑπ' ὄμμασιν αὐτὴν τιθεῖσα τοῦ Πατρός. ὑμνῳδὸς δὲ ἀποτελεῖται τῶν θείων ἡ ψυχή, κατὰ τὸ λόγιον, τὰ συνθήματα τοῦ Πατρὸς τὰ ἄρρητα προσβαλλομένη καὶ προσφέρουσα αὐτὰ τῷ Πατρί, ἃ ἐνέθετο ὁ Πατὴρ εἰς αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ παρόδῳ τῆς οὐσίας. τοιοῦτοι γὰρ οἱ νοεροὶ καὶ ἀφανεῖς ὕμνοι ἀναγομένης ψυχῆς, ἀνακινοῦντες τὴν μνήμην τῶν ἁρμονικῶν λόγων οἳ φέρουσιν ἀπορρήτους εἰκόνας τῶν θείων ἐν αὐτῇ δυνάμεων.

> being the only imperishable one, does not accept a perishable hymn; let us not, then, hope to win over by a vain whirl of words (κενῇ ῥημάτων καταιγίδι), nor yet with a show of rites adorned by artifice, the master of true utterances (λόγοι). God loves a fair form unadorned. Let us then dedicate to God a hymn of the following sort: let us leave behind the essence which is fluid (τὴν ῥέουσαν οὐσίαν); let us proceed to our true goal, which is likeness to Him; let us recognise our Master, let us love our Father; let us hearken to His call; let us run to the warmth, fleeing the cold; let us become fire, let us journey through the fire. We have a way free for ascent; the Father guides us, laying open the ways of fire.[45]

The above passages, especially the last, which Hans Lewy has finely dubbed Proclus' 'Fire-Song',[46] should be sufficient to indicate the general nature of the higher type of prayer, even if they leave us not much the wiser as to precisely how to attain to it. That, however, is not to be expected within the Hellenic tradition; we are not going to be favoured with any Indian-style manuals of meditation. All we can conclude is that union with God is the result of a procedure which may begin with hymns, prayers, and theurgic rituals, but which rises, through a variety of spiritual exercises, to a direct confrontation with, and absorption into, a fiery light-source.

There is a good deal more that one could say, and that has been said, about Neoplatonic prayer, but this will suffice for my purposes. I should apologise, I suppose, for introducing such extra-rational considerations as I have just been indulging in into an otherwise respectable scholarly collection of papers, but I think it is important to remind ourselves that philosophy for the later Platonists is a thoroughly religious way of life, and that an important aspect of their daily activity was the practice of prayer, sacrifice and meditation, none of which activities are central to the doing of philosophy today; and further, that 'prayer' did not consist, at its higher reaches, of anything like the recital of prayers such as we might find scattered through the pages of their works, but rather of something much more in the nature of the practice of meditation techniques,

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45 Proclus, *Eclogae de philosophia Chaldaica*, fr. 11, ed. Des Places (1971), 207.17–208.2: "Ὑμνος δὲ τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐ λόγοι σύνθετοι, οὐκ ἔργων κατασκευή· μόνος γὰρ ἄφθαρτος ὤν, φθαρτὸν ὕμνον οὐ δέχεται· μὴ οὖν κενῇ ῥημάτων καταιγίδι πείσειν ἐλπίζωμεν τὸν λόγων ἀληθῶν δεσπότην μηδὲ ἔργων φαντασίᾳ μετὰ τέχνης κεκαλλωπισμένων· ἀκαλλώπιστον εὐμορφίαν θεὸς φιλεῖ. Ὕμνον οὖν τῷ θεῷ τοῦτον ἀναθῶμεν· καταλίπωμεν τὴν ῥέουσαν οὐσίαν· ἔλθωμεν ἐπὶ τὸν ἀληθῆ σκοπόν, τὴν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐξομοίωσιν· γνωρίσωμεν τὸν δεσπότην, ἀγαπήσωμεν τὸν Πατέρα· καλοῦντι πεισθῶμεν· τῷ θερμῷ προσδράμωμεν, τὸ ψυχρὸν ἐκφυγόντες· πῦρ γενώμεθα, διὰ πυρὸς ὁδεύσωμεν.

46 Lewy (1978), Excursus IX, 491–493.

such as are copiously attested for Eastern religious philosophies, but on the details of which our men are remarkably reticent.

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Modes of Prayer in the Hellenic Tradition

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Between the pagan tradition of Hellenistic philosophy and ancient Christianity, there are elements of continuity as well as rupture. The case of prayer is often cited as one domain in which this rupture is particularly notable: on the one hand, the pagan petitionary prayer, which demands material goods, and is in general linked to a ritual of animal sacrifice in a sort of commercial transaction; on the other hand, opposed to this, the Christian petitionary prayer that requests spiritual grace; prayers of worship and meditation; or even prayers of adoration, all of these strangers to sacrificial rituals. It is true that Christianity operated without the bloodiness of animal sacrifice, but, just like the pagans, ordinary Christians can request earthly advantages for themselves and for their loved ones, or address supplications to God with the aim of bringing harm to their enemies. It is not, however, by way of the study of popular Christian piety that I want to uncover aspects of continuity between Hellenism and Christianity. Other elements of continuity appear when one instead confronts pagan and Christian discourse on prayer: the ideal Christian prayer, that extolled by the great theologians, in many ways recalls pagan prayer in its loftiest conception.

Pagan Critics of Petitionary Prayer

In Plato's *Euthyphro* (14c), Socrates asks his interlocutor the following question: "Is to pray (εὔχεσθαι) not to address one's demands (αἰτεῖν) to the gods?" Euthyphro declares that he agrees with this definition, which is in accordance too with the thrust of traditional Greek religion.[1] This link between prayer and petition voiced by Socrates remains through the centuries. Petitionary prayer, however, becomes the object of criticism very early on, and, although not the most frequent outcome, these early critics can go as far as the rejection of petitionary prayer altogether.

* The author would like to express his thanks to Laura Brazier for her translation, and to Andrei Timotin for some bibliographical indications.

1 See Rudhardt (1958), especially 187–202; Aubriot-Sévin (1992); Jakov, Voutiras (2005); Voutiras (2009).

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An initial critical argument, of a practical, utilitarian sort, insists on the danger that the requests present to those praying. The author of the *Second Alcibiades*, who is without a doubt not Plato, but an Academician from the 4th or 3rd century BCE, offers his reflection on prayer (προσευχή), which gives its sub-title to the dialogue.[2] Socrates develops the theme of the prayer which, answered by the gods, returns to the one that prayed it:

> It is rare to find anyone who has either declined what was offered to him or, when he was likely to gain something by prayer, refrained from praying. Most men would not decline the offer of either a monarchy or a generalship or any of the various other things which bring with them harm rather than benefit, but would even pray to be granted them in cases where they were lacking: but after a little while they often change their tune, and retract all their former prayers.[3]
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> transl. W.R.M. LAMB

The reason for this return, explains Socrates, is that the tyrants and strategists fear losing their lives in exercising the functions obtained following their prayers. Alcibiades comments on Socrates' words by underlining that "through prayer we demand the worst things for ourselves" (143b) and he concludes that henceforth we should speak not of prayer, but rather of curse (κατάρα), since by demanding from the gods that which is unsuitable, we are cursing ourselves.

A second argument is that of the immorality of petitionary prayer. In the middle of the 1st century CE, in one of his *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, Seneca sends his correspondent a "gift" which is a maxim of Athenodorus:

> It is a true saying which I have found in Athenodorus. 'Know that thou art freed from all desires when thou hast reached such a point thou prayest to God for nothing except what thou canst pray for openly'. But how foolish men are now! They whisper the basest of prayers to heaven, but if anyone listens, they are silent at once. That which they are unwilling for men to know, they communicate to God. Do you not think, then, that some such

2 See now Zeller (2002); Scrofani (2009).

3 [Plato], *Second Alcibiades* 142c–d: ἀλλ' ὅμως τούτων τε καὶ ἑτέρων πολλῶν ὁμοιοτρόπων τούτοις οὕτω σφόδρα καταδήλων ὄντων, σπάνιον εὑρεῖν ὅστις ἂν ἢ διδομένων ἀπόσχοιτο ἢ μέλλων δι' εὐχῆς τεύξεσθαι παύσαιτο ἂν εὐχόμενος· οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ οὔτε ἂν τυραννίδος διδομένης ἀπόσχοιντο ἂν οὔτε στρατηγίας οὐδ' ἑτέρων πολλῶν, ἃ παρόντα βλάπτει μᾶλλον ἢ ὠφελεῖ, ἀλλὰ κἂν εὔξαιντο ἂν γενέσθαι, εἴ τῳ μὴ παρόντα τυγχάνει.

> wholesome advice as this could be given you: 'Live among men as if God beheld you, speak with God as if men were listening'.[4]
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> transl. R.M. GUMMERE

In the 2nd century CE, Lucian takes up the theme of abject prayer once more, but enriches it with other considerations, in a text in which everything is turned to his advantage against petitionary prayer. Menippus recounts his journey to the home of Zeus:

> Pursuing such topics, we came to the place where he had to sit and hear the prayers. There was a row of openings like mouths of wells, with covers on them, and beside each stood a golden throne. Sitting down by the first one, Zeus took off the cover and gave his attention to the people who were praying. The prayers came from all parts of the world and were of all sorts and kinds, for I myself bent over the orifice and listened to them along with him. They went like this; 'O Zeus, may I succeed in becoming king!' 'O Zeus, make my onions and my garlic grow!' 'O ye gods, let my father die quickly!'; and now and then one or another would say: 'O that I may inherit my wife's property!' 'O that I may be undetected in my plot against my brother!' 'May I succeed in winning my suit' 'Let me win the wreath at the Olympic games!'. Among seafaring men, one was praying for the north wind to blow, another for the south wind; and the farmers were praying for rain while the washermen were praying for sunshine. Zeus listened and weighed each prayer carefully, but did not promise everything; 'This by the Father was granted and that was denied them.' You see, he let the just prayers come up through the orifice and then took them and filed them away at his right; but he sent the impious ones back ungranted, blowing them downward so that they might not even come near Heaven. In the case of one petition I observed that he was really in a dilemma: when two men made contrary prayers and promised equal sacrifices, he didn't know which one of them to give assent to; so that he was in the same plight as the Academicians and

4 Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* I 10, 5: *Sed ut more meo cum aliquo munusculo epistulam mittam, verum est quod apud Athenodorum inveni: 'tunc scito esse te omnibus cupiditatibus solutum, cum eo perveneris ut nihil deum roges nisi quod rogare possis palam'. Nunc enim quanta dementia est hominum! turpissima vota dis insusurrant; si quis admoverit aurem, conticiscent, et quod scire hominem nolunt deo narrant. Vide ergo ne hoc praecipi salubriter possit: 'sic vive cum hominibus tamquam deus videat, sic loquere cum deo tamquam homines audiant'.*

> could not make any affirmation at all, but suspended judgement for a while and thought it over, like Pyrrho.[5]
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> transl. A.M. HARMON

Many themes intertwine in this brilliant and amusing text: the requests are in turn unworthy, derisory, immoral, criminal, contradictory and unjust; they conceal poorly a wish for power and misplaced pride, glory, a desire for riches, a frenzied egotism; they are just like humanity—mediocre, even criminal.

Three more arguments in a philosophical and theological vein are put forward against petitionary prayer. The first consists in saying that such a prayer shows an incorrect conception of divinity, as if the divine would allow itself to be bought by men and cede itself to unrighteous requests. This argument is implicit in Lucian's text, but it is much older, since Plato, in Book X of the *Laws* (885d), establishes that the gods do not allow themselves to be swayed by gifts offered unrighteously.[6]

The second argument consists in underlining the uselessness of petitionary prayer if God is provident: according to Aristippus of Cyrene (fr. 132), a disciple of Socrates, founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy: "It is ridiculous to pray for things in a general way, and to demand something from god; it is not when a patient asks for food or drink that a doctor gives it to him, but when the doctor is of the opinion that it is useful".[7] Thus, provident God is

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5 Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 25: Τοιαῦθ' ἅμα διεξιόντες ἀφικνούμεθα ἐς τὸ χωρίον ἔνθα ἔδει αὐτὸν καθεζόμενον διακοῦσαι τῶν εὐχῶν. θυρίδες δὲ ἦσαν ἐξῆς τοῖς στομίοις τῶν φρεάτων ἐοικυῖαι πώματα ἔχουσαι, καὶ παρ' ἑκάστῃ θρόνος ἔκειτο χρυσοῦς. καθίσας οὖν ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς πρώτης ὁ Ζεὺς καὶ ἀφελὼν τὸ πῶμα παρεῖχε τοῖς εὐχομένοις ἑαυτόν· εὔχοντο δὲ πανταχόθεν τῆς γῆς διάφορα καὶ ποικίλα. συμπαρακύψας γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπήκουον ἅμα τῶν εὐχῶν. ἦσαν δὲ τοιαίδε, Ὦ Ζεῦ, βασιλεῦσαί μοι γένοιτο· Ὦ Ζεῦ, τὰ κρόμμυά μοι φῦναι καὶ τὰ σκόροδα· Ὦ θεοί, τὸν πατέρα μοι ταχέως ἀποθανεῖν· ὁ δέ τις ἂν ἔφη, Εἴθε κληρονομήσαιμι τῆς γυναικός, Εἴθε λάθοιμι ἐπιβουλεύσας τῷ ἀδελφῷ, Γένοιτό μοι νικῆσαι τὴν δίκην, Δὸς στεφθῆναι τὰ Ὀλύμπια. τῶν πλεόντων δὲ ὁ μὲν βορέαν εὔχετο ἐπιπνεῦσαι, ὁ δὲ νότον, ὁ δὲ γεωργὸς ᾔτει ὑετόν, ὁ δὲ γναφεὺς ἥλιον. Ἐπακούων δὲ ὁ Ζεὺς καὶ τὴν εὐχὴν ἑκάστην ἀκριβῶς ἐξετάζων οὐ πάντα ὑπισχνεῖτο, ἀλλ' ἕτερον μὲν ἔδωκε πατήρ, ἕτερον δ' ἀνένευσε· τὰς μὲν γὰρ δικαίας τῶν εὐχῶν προσίετο ἄνω διὰ τοῦ στομίου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιὰ κατετίθει φέρων, τὰς δὲ ἀνοσίους ἀπράκτους αὖθις ἀπέπεμπεν ἀποφυσῶν κάτω, ἵνα μηδὲ πλησίον γένοιντο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. ἐπὶ μιᾶς δέ τινος εὐχῆς καὶ ἀποροῦντα αὐτὸν ἐθεασάμην· δύο γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τἀναντία εὐχομένων καὶ τὰς ἴσας θυσίας ὑπισχνουμένων οὐκ εἶχεν ὁποτέρῳ μᾶλλον ἐπινεύσειεν αὐτῶν, ὥστε δὴ τὸ Ἀκαδημαϊκὸν ἐκεῖνο ἐπεπόνθει καὶ οὐδέν τι ἀποφήνασθαι δυνατὸς ἦν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὁ Πύρρων ἐπεῖχεν ἔτι καὶ διεσκέπτετο.

6 See Mayhew (2008).

7 Edition by Giannantoni (1990), *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, vol. II, s. IV A, 53 (= fr. 227 Mannebach). It is incorrectly that G. Giannantoni claims that fragment 132 is found identi-

like the doctor, who does not act according to the demands of his patient, but when it is necessary and useful to them; and provident God knows better than us that which is useful to us, and at precisely what time it is useful to us.

The third argument concerns the way in which providence is conceived.[8] According to the Neoplatonist Proclus, Porphyry, the student of Plotinus who wrote in the 300s, distinguished among the ancient philosophers those who accepted petitionary prayer and those who rejected it. He divided the latter into three categories: those who didn't accept the existence of the gods; those who, whilst accepting the existence of the gods, denied providence; and finally, those who accepted both the gods and providence, but who conceived of providence in terms of necessity, and consequently rejected that there are contingent things.[9] Porphyry uses the word atheism to describe the two first categories, but not the third. It is necessary to develop that which remains implicit in this text: the first category of atheists evidently refuses all forms of prayer, since prayer has no possible addressee, but these atheists were very few in Antiquity. The second category of atheists, those who deny providence, are primarily the Epicureans, for whom the gods were not concerned with mortals. Aristotle and the Peripatetics, who limited divine intervention to the supralunary world,[10] would perhaps also fall into this category. The third category of philosophers, who conceive of providence in terms of necessity and of destiny, and who deny the existence of contingent things that could sway the powers of providence, are the Stoics. In their doctrine in which every event is necessary and in which the order of the world is immutable, there is not normally space for the demands of men.[11] Nevertheless, certain Stoics did practise a form of petitionary prayer, as we shall see later on.

The most cited indictment against petitionary prayer that Antiquity has bequeathed to us is found in the 2nd century CE rhetorician Maximus of Tyre's

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cally in Diogenes Laertius (VI 42), who attributes it to Diogenes the Cynic. Diogenes' remarks on prayer are translated and analysed at the end of this first section.

8 See Pépin (1976).

9 Proclus, *In Tim.* II 207–208.

10 In fact, Epicureanism does not denounce prayer completely: the only prayer that it allows is the prayer of adoration. See Witt (1954), 288.

11 See also the argumentation of Cyniscos in Lucian, *Zeus Cross-Examined* 5–6, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate*, ed. P. Thillet, chapter 20 (the very existence of prayer is an argument in favour of freedom and against Stoic destiny). Upon the problem of prayer and immutability, see Magris 1990.

treatise *Whether it be necessary to pray*.[12] One can find therein the majority of the arguments summarised earlier. The treatise opens with the example of Midas who obtains the transformation of his land into gold from the demon Satyrus, thus causing famine. This example proves that requests are often made by fools who have not reflected upon the consequences of their dangerous prayers. The example of Croesus, who prays to Apollo to grant him victory over Persia, receiving from the god an oracle that he misinterprets and consequently losing his own kingdom, shows that certain petitionary prayers bring not advantage but catastrophe, and as such are actually curses against the petitioner. In addition to these examples, the texts in which Homer recounts petitionary prayers bring to life unjust gods, who are rapacious and allow themselves to be corrupted by sacrifices, whereas a sound conception of the divine implies that gods are just, inflexible, and incorruptible. In fact, Maximus claims that prayer is useless, because either he that prays is worthy of receiving that which he requests and will receive it anyway, or he is unworthy and will not receive it, despite his prayers. Furthermore, he who is worthy and does not bother the gods is still more worthy, whilst he who is unworthy and bothers the gods increases his unworthiness.

After this initial series of arguments, Maximus of Tyre reflects on the things that are prayed for. These fall into four different domains: providence, destiny, fortune and skill; however, in each of the four cases, prayer is useless. Firstly, it is useless to pray for providence (πρόνοια). According to the hypothesis whereby providence is general and extends to the whole world, but not its individual parts, God will not allow himself to be swayed if he is asked for something that goes against the interests of the whole, in the same way as the doctor who would not hesitate to amputate a limb to save his patient. Likewise, in a hypothesis in which providence does extend to the individual and is specific, prayer serves no purpose since God, like the doctor, will give that which is good even if it is not asked of him, and will refuse that which is harmful even if it is requested. Secondly, in the case of things that are dependent on destiny (εἱμαρμένη), prayer is risible, because destiny is tyrannical, inflexible, implacable, and must affect all, even the gods.[13] Thirdly, Maximus establishes that it is useless to pray for fortune (τύχη), which is by definition unstable, irrational, unpredictable and impulsive. Finally, there is no use in praying for skill (τέχνη), since its attainment is dependent on us: a cartwright does not pray for a beautiful cart,

12 This treatise has been studied by Soury (1942), especially 15–38, and by Carl O'Brien in this volume (see *infra*, pp. 58–72).

13 See Lucian, *Zeus Cross-Examined* 5–6.

if he is a master of cartmaking. Concluding this development in the argument with a paradox, Maximus shows that in order to succeed in life, it is more effective to live dishonestly than it is to pray to the gods.

Throughout Maximus of Tyre's demonstration we expect a final rejection of petitionary prayer, yet it does not come. Why is this? An initial way of responding to this question is to note that in Antiquity, outright rejection of petitionary prayer was exceptional, even amongst its harshest critics. Let us take the example of a contemporary of Plato, Diogenes the Cynic. Diogenes Laertius tells us that "he would rebuke men in general with regard to their prayers, declaring that they asked for those things which seemed to them to be good, not for such as are truly good".[14] We recognise here, according to how we choose to interpret it, an argument based on danger or on immorality. But even if the text informs us of Diogenes' critical attitude towards others, it tells us nothing of his personal convictions. Perhaps he himself did not address requests to the gods, or perhaps even he did not believe in the gods. It is more probable, however, that he considered his relations with the gods to be a private matter between him and the gods, and perhaps he did request things that were truly good, unlike other men. In any case, Diogenes seems to accept the legitimacy of petitionary prayer that is centred on things that are "truly good", in short, a petitionary prayer that is transformed in comparison with its traditional form.

It is evidently this transformation of petitionary prayer that allows Maximus of Tyre and others not to reject it. But what is this transformation? That is what I should like to examine next.

The Transformation of Petitionary Prayer

The transformation of petitionary prayer appears very early on, as the examples of Pythagoras and Socrates show. According to Diodorus of Sicily, "Pythagoras used to assert that in their supplications men should pray simply (ἁπλῶς) for 'all good things,' and not name them singly, as, for example, power, strength, beauty, wealth, and the like; for it frequently happens that any one of these works to the utter ruin of those who receive them in reply to their desire".[15] We

14 Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* VI 42 (transl. R.D. Hicks): ἐνεκάλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις περὶ τῆς εὐχῆς, αἰτεῖσθαι λέγων αὐτοὺς ἀγαθὰ τὰ αὐτοῖς δοκοῦντα καὶ οὐ τὰ κατ' ἀλήθειαν.

15 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* X 9, 8 (transl. C.H. Oldfather): "Οτι ὁ αὐτὸς ἔφασκε δεῖν ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἁπλῶς εὔχεσθαι τἀγαθά, καὶ μὴ κατὰ μέρος ὀνομάζειν, οἷον ἐξουσίαν, κάλ-

see that Pythagoras doesn't challenge the practice of petitionary prayer, but he draws attention to its dangers, which are such that those that pray could be gravely harmed thanks to their prayer. In fact, only the gods know the things that are suitable for each man; prayer should therefore be for good things in general, rather than for one thing in particular, which could turn out to be illusory and dangerous.

Let us now turn to Socrates. The discussion on piety (περὶ ὁσίου) that pits him against the priest Euthyphro falls down because, unlike the latter, Socrates refuses to define piety, one form of which is prayer, as "a commercial transaction that defines the relationships between the gods and men" (14e), that is, men buying what they need in their lives with their gifts to the gods. Thus, a requirement for a loftier prayer emerges. Xenophon wrote another important text, in which Socrates "asked simply for gifts that were good, for the gods know best what things are good, whereas to pray for gold or silver or sovereignty or any other such thing was just like praying for a wager or a fight or anything of which the result is obviously uncertain".[16] In other words, like Pythagoras, Socrates practises petitionary prayer; but he objects to the requests of ordinary men, because he considers that wealth and power come, not from the gods, but on the whim of Fortune; and his request, like that of Pythagoras, is for nothing more precise than simply "good things", since the gods know what is good for each of us. A final interesting text comes at the end of Plato's *Phaedrus* (279b–c), wherein Socrates and Phaedrus have just been discussing love and beauty on the banks of the Ilissus. Before parting, Socrates suggests to Phaedrus that he address a prayer to the gods of the region: "O beloved Pan and all ye other gods of this place, grant to me that I be made beautiful in my soul within, and that all external possessions be in harmony with my inner man. May I consider the wise man rich; and may I have such wealth as only the self-restrained man can bear or endure".[17]

Socrates doesn't challenge polytheism or petitionary prayer; but the prayer, thanks to its distinction between gifts for the soul, which are those that matter,

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λος, πλοῦτον, τἄλλα τὰ τούτοις ὅμοια· πολλάκις γὰρ τούτων ἕκαστον τοὺς κατ' ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτῶν τυχόντας τοῖς ὅλοις ἀνατρέπειν.

16 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I 3, 2 (transl. E.C. Marchant): ηὔχετο δὲ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς ἁπλῶς τἀγαθὰ διδόναι, ὡς τοὺς θεοὺς κάλλιστα εἰδότας ὁποῖα ἀγαθά ἐστι· τοὺς δ' εὐχομένους χρυσίον ἢ ἀργύριον ἢ τυραννίδα ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν διάφορον ἐνόμιζεν εὔχεσθαι ἢ εἰ κυβείαν ἢ μάχην ἢ ἄλλο τι εὔχοιντο τῶν φανερῶς ἀδήλων ὅπως ἀποβήσοιτο.

17 Plato, *Phaedrus* 279b–c (transl. H.N. Fowler): Ὦ φίλε Πάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῇδε θεοί, δοίητέ μοι καλῷ γενέσθαι τἄνδοθεν· ἔξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναί μοι φίλια. πλούσιον δὲ νομίζοιμι τὸν σοφόν· τὸ δὲ χρυσοῦ πλῆθος εἴη μοι ὅσον μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν δύναιτο ἄλλος ἢ ὁ σώφρων.

and external gifts, which must correspond to the former, reaches a dimension that could be deemed spiritual. The result of this is that Socrates' request becomes paradoxical and ironic: he asks Pan that he may consider the wise man rich, but the wise man, who does not concern himself with material wealth, is poor in the eyes of opinion. Through his wisdom, however, the wise man possesses the only richness that counts: spiritual richness. Socrates asks the gods for as much gold as will keep him a temperate man and his own master: in other words, none.[18]

This spiritual transformation of petitionary prayer appears again in the tradition of the Academy. In the *Second Alcibiades* (143a), which dates from the 4th or 3rd century BCE, Socrates considers the frequent case of men who pray for things that are not suitable, and agrees with the words of the poet, without doubt a Pythagorean, who said: "King Zeus, give unto us what is good, whether we pray or pray not; but what is grievous, even if we pray for it, do thou avert".[19] Similarly, later in the text, Socrates establishes that the gods pay attention, not to offerings and sacrifices, but to the soul and its virtues, and that the prayer of the poet does not seek that which is external, but that which is internal. It is necessary to request that which is good for us, and which is necessarily in keeping with justice; and, when we ask for what we think is a good thing, but that is in reality bad, we must pray to the gods not to grant our request.

The Neoplatonic tradition from the end of Antiquity shows the same spiritual transformation of petitionary prayer. In the 300s, Porphyry addresses a *Letter* to his wife Marcella, which is in fact a true guide to spiritual life; the question of prayer is tackled many times. Porphyry claims that petitionary prayer is legitimate, on the condition that God is thanked for his gifts: "It is not wrong to pray to God, since ingratitude is a grievous wrong".[20] However, for the petitionary prayer to be granted by God, certain conditions must be fulfilled in the life of the one praying: "The prayer which is accompanied by base actions is impure, and therefore not acceptable to God, but that which is accompanied by noble actions is pure, and at the same time acceptable".[21] He that prays must subsequently hold onto that which he requests: "Wherefore we should pray to God for that which is worthy of Him, and we should pray for what we could

18 See Jackson (1971).

19 [Plato], *Second Alcibiades* 143a (transl. W.R.M. Lamb): Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ, τὰ μὲν ἐσθλά, φησί, καὶ εὐχομένοις καὶ ἀνεύκτοις ἄμμι δίδου, τὰ δὲ δειλὰ καὶ εὐχομένοις ἀπαλέξειν κελεύει.

20 Porphyry, *Letter to Marcella* 23 (transl. A. Zimmern): εὔχεσθαι θεῷ οὐ κακόν, ὡς τὸ ἀχαριστεῖν πονηρότατον.

21 Ibid. 24: εὐχὴ ἡ μὲν μετὰ φαύλων ἔργων ἀκάθαρτος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἀπρόσδεκτος ὑπὸ θεοῦ· ἡ δὲ μετὰ καλῶν ἔργων καθαρά τε ὁμοῦ καὶ εὐπρόσδεκτος.

attain from none other [...] Wherefore desire and ask of God what is in accordance with His own will and nature".[22]

In other words, prayer is a means of making us similar to God, according to what we find in Plato's *Theaetetus*. Conduct that is beyond reproach, when combined with the correct content, makes a prayer that is worthy of God, that concerns neither the body nor the capricious gifts of Fortune, but the soul and inner life:

> And we must pray that we may attain after our labours those things that are preceded by toil and virtue; for the prayer of the slothful is but vain speech. Neither ask of God what thou will not hold fast when thou hast attained it, since God's gifts cannot be taken from you, and he will not give what you will not hold fast. What you will not require when you are rid of the body, that despise, but practise thyself in that you will need when you are set free, calling on God to be your helper. You will need none of those things which chance often gives and again takes away. Do not make any request before the fitting season, but only when God makes plain the right desire implanted by nature within you.[23]
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> transl. A. ZIMMERN

The optimistic ending of this text deserves particular attention: the correct request is within each of us by nature, and we are able to discover it with the progression of our spiritual life and with the help of God.

A contemporary of Porphyry, Iamblichus, has preserved for us a good example of a spiritualised petitionary prayer. Here is how he ends his *The Reply of the Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo, and the Solutions to the Questions it contains*, a work better known under the title *On the Mysteries of Egypt* (*De Mysteriis*): "It remains, therefore, at the end of this discourse, for me to pray to the gods to grant both to me and to you the unalterable preservation of true thoughts, to implant in us the truth of eternal things forever, and to grant to us

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22 Ibid. 12–13: ὅθεν καὶ εὐκτέον θεῷ τὰ ἄξια θεοῦ. καὶ αἰτώμεθα, ἃ μὴ λάβοιμεν ἂν παρ' ἑτέρου [...] ταῦτ' οὖν θέλε καὶ αἰτοῦ τὸν θεὸν ἃ θέλει τε καὶ ἔστιν αὐτός.

23 Ibid. 12: καὶ ὧν ἡγεμόνες οἱ μετ' ἀρετῆς πόνοι, ταῦτα εὐχώμεθα γενέσθαι μετὰ τοὺς πόνους· εὐχὴ γὰρ ῥᾳθύμου μάταιος λόγος. ἃ δὲ κτησαμένη οὐ καθέξεις, μὴ αἰτοῦ παρὰ θεοῦ· δῶρον γὰρ θεοῦ πᾶν ἀναφαίρετον· ὥστε οὐ δώσει, ὃ μὴ καθέξεις. ὧν δὴ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσα οὐ δεηθήσῃ, ἐκείνων καταφρόνει· καὶ ὧν ἂν ἀπαλλαγεῖσα δεηθῇς, ταῦτά σοι ἀσκουμένῃ τὸν θεὸν παρακάλει γενέσθαι συλλήπτορα. οὔκουν δεήσῃ οὐδενός, ὧν καὶ ἡ τύχη δοῦσα πολλάκις πάλιν ἀφαιρεῖται. οὐδὲ δεῖ πρὸ καιροῦ τινὸς τὴν αἴτησιν ποιεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ὅταν σοι ὁ θεὸς ἐν σοὶ οὖσαν φύσει τὴν ὀρθὴν αἴτησιν ἐκφήνῃ.

a participation in the more perfect conceptions of the gods in which the most blessed end of good things is placed before us, along with the sanction of the harmonious friendship between us".[24]

Let us move, now, to the Stoic tradition. One would expect it to ignore petitionary prayer, which *a priori* seems incompatible with the physics and ethics of the Stoa. As regards the physics, since, given that everything happens in accordance with divine providence, which is bound up with immutable destiny, petitionary prayer is either useless or impious—useless if the request conforms to world order and impious if the reverse is true. As regards their ethics, petitionary prayer is unacceptable because the request, in order to be a request, must concern things that are not within our control; wisdom, however, consists in being indifferent to that which is not within our control. However, Seneca writes this to Lucilius: "As for your former prayers, you may dispense the gods from answering them; offer new prayers; pray for a sound mind and for good health, first of soul and then of body. And of course you should offer those prayers frequently. Call boldly upon God; you will not be asking him for that which belongs to another".[25]

At the end of the 2nd century CE, not even the emperor Marcus Aurelius ignores petitionary prayer:

> Either the Gods have no power or they have power. If they have no power, why pray to them? But if they have power, why not rather pray that they should give thee freedom from fear of any of these things and from lust for any of these things and from grief at any of these things [rather] than that they should grant this or refuse that. For obviously if they can assist men at all, they can assist them in this. But perhaps thou wilt say: *The Gods have put this in my power*. Then is it not better to use what is in thy power like a free man than to concern thyself with what is not in thy power like a slave and an abject? And who told thee that the Gods do not co-operate with us even in the things that are in our power? Begin at any rate with

24 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* X 8, 293.12–294.4 (transl. E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon, J.P. Hershbell): Εὔχομαι δὴ οὖν τὸ λοιπὸν τοῖς θεοῖς ἐπὶ τῷ τέλει τῶν λόγων, τῶν ἀληθῶν νοημάτων ἐμοί τε καὶ σοὶ παρέχειν τὴν φυλακὴν ἀμετάπτωτον, εἴς τε τὸν ἀίδιον αἰῶνα τῶν αἰωνίων ἀλήθειαν ἐντιθέναι, καὶ τελειοτέρων νοήσεων περὶ θεῶν χορηγεῖν μετουσίαν, ἐν αἷς δὴ καὶ τὸ μακαριστὸν τέλος τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν πρόκειται καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ κῦρος τῆς ὁμονοητικῆς φιλίας τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

25 Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* I 10, 4 (transl. R.M. Gummere): *Votorum tuorum veterum licet deis gratiam facias, alia de integro suscipe: roga bonam mentem, bonam valetudinem animi, deinde tunc corporis. Quidni tu ista vota saepe facias? Audacter deum roga: nihil illum de alieno rogaturus es.*

> prayers for such things and thou wilt see. One prays: *How may I lie with that woman!* Thou: *How may I not lust to lie with her!* Another: *How may I be quit of that man!* Thou: *How may I not wish to be quit of him!* Another: *How may I not lose my little child!* Thou: *How may I not dread to lose him*. In a word, give thy prayers this turn, and see what comes of it.[26]
>
> transl. C.R. HAINES

These two texts require some clarification: in Seneca's view, we must only ask of god that which is dependent on him; the health of the soul and of the body. The health of the soul is however of higher importance than that of the body, doubtless because the former is also within our control, whereas the latter is not. The thinking of Marcus Aurelius is noticeably different from that of Seneca, and he subscribes more truly to the Stoic tradition: he claims that the request cannot be for things that are not within our control: love for a woman, hatred for a man, or the loss of a child. From this example, we can conclude that Marcus Aurelius would doubtless have classed physical health among those things that are not within our control, whereas, in Seneca's opinion, physical health can be requested in prayer. In the point of view of Marcus Aurelius, rather than pray for those things that are not within our control, we should substitute instead those things that are: the control and elimination of desire, hatred, and worry. The most important point to take from Marcus Aurelius, however, is that those things that are within our control are also within the control of the gods. It is therefore wholly legitimate to ask the gods for their help to control our desires. Marcus Aurelius does not explain further this claim that the gods can intervene in those things that are within our control: how is it possible that these things are at the same time within our own control and within the control of the gods? We recognise here one of the central difficulties in Stoic theology, which affirms both the freedom of the wise man and the total influence of destiny. In the end, it is all perhaps a question of point of view:

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26 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* IX 40: Ἤτοι οὐδὲν δύνανται οἱ θεοὶ ἢ δύνανται. εἰ μὲν οὖν μὴ δύνανται, τί εὔχῃ; εἰ δὲ δύνανται, διὰ τί οὐχὶ μᾶλλον εὔχῃ διδόναι αὐτοὺς τὸ μήτε φοβεῖσθαί τι τούτων μήτε ἐπιθυμεῖν τινος τούτων μήτε λυπεῖσθαι ἐπί τινι τούτων, μᾶλλον ἢπερ τὸ μὴ παρεῖναί τι τούτων ἢ τὸ παρεῖναι; πάντως γάρ, εἰ δύνανται συνεργεῖν ἀνθρώποις, καὶ εἰς ταῦτα δύνανται συνεργεῖν. ἀλλὰ ἴσως ἐρεῖς ὅτι· ἐπ' ἐμοὶ αὐτὰ οἱ θεοὶ ἐποίησαν. εἶτα οὐ κρεῖσσον χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἐπὶ σοὶ μετ' ἐλευθερίας ἢ διαφέρεσθαι πρὸς τὰ μὴ ἐπὶ σοὶ μετὰ δουλείας καὶ ταπεινότητος; τίς δέ σοι εἶπεν ὅτι οὐχὶ καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν οἱ θεοὶ συλλαμβάνουσιν; ἄρξαι γοῦν περὶ τούτων εὔχεσθαι καὶ ὄψει. οὗτος εὔχεται· πῶς κοιμηθῶ μετ' ἐκείνης· σύ· πῶς μὴ ἐπιθυμήσω τοῦ κοιμηθῆναι μετ' ἐκείνης. ἄλλος· πῶς στερηθῶ ἐκείνου· σύ· πῶς μὴ χρῄζω τοῦ στερηθῆναι. ἄλλος· πῶς μὴ ἀποβάλω τὸ τεκνίον· σύ· πῶς μὴ φοβηθῶ ἀποβαλεῖν. ὅλως ὧδε ἐπίστρεψον τὰς εὐχὰς καὶ θεώρει τί γίνεται.

from the point of view of the wise man and of spiritual life, actions are free, but from the point of view of the gods, everything conforms to the world order. Furthermore, these two points of view can be reconciled each time the wise man takes the gods' point of view on matters—freedom thus appears as an expression of necessity.

Let us turn our attention back to Maximus of Tyre, who is a rhetorician and not a philosopher. We would expect his treatise to conclude with a rejection of petitionary prayer, but there is nothing. Maximus imagines that his reader objects to the demonstration that he has just given on the uselessness of prayer on the basis that Socrates, Pythagoras, Plato, and the others, all pray. He adds:

> But you believe the philosopher's prayer to be a request for what he does not have, whereas in my opinion it is a conversation or discussion with the gods about what he does not have, and a demonstration of his virtue. Or do you think that Socrates really prayed for riches or for power over the Athenians? Far from it! It was indeed to the gods that he prayed, but it was from himself, with their blessing, that he received his virtuous soul, his serene career, his irreproachable life, and his cheerful death—those amazing, 'god-given' gifts. If someone asks the earth for a peaceful voyage, or the sea for a good harvest, or a weaver for a plough, or a carpenter for a cloak, he goes away balked and frustrated and empty-handed. O Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, you who watch over the ways of men, it is pupils who are philosophers that you require, pupils who will receive your science in strong souls, and yield a fine and happy harvest in their lives. But this form of husbandry is rare; it makes its appearance with difficulty and belatedly. Yet human life cannot dispense with this small, rare flame, as it appears now in one body now in another, any more than sparks of light can be dispensed with at dead of night. The element of good in human nature is not great, yet it is this sparse element that time and again preserves the whole. If you deprive life of philosophy, you have removed from it the living, breathing spark that alone knows how to pray. So too if you deprive the body of its soul, you cause the body to freeze into immobility; if you deprive the earth of its crops, you emasculate the earth; and if you deprive the day of the sun, you extinguish the day.[27]
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> transl. M.B. TRAPP

27 Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertations* V 8: ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ἡγεῖ τὴν τοῦ φιλοσόφου εὐχὴν αἴτησιν εἶναι τῶν οὐ παρόντων, ἐγὼ δὲ ὁμιλίαν καὶ διάλεκτον πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς περὶ τῶν παρόντων καὶ ἐπίδειξιν τῆς ἀρετῆς· ἢ οἴει τοῦτο εὔχετο ὁ Σωκράτης, ὅπως αὐτῷ χρήματα γένηται ἢ ὅπως ἄρξῃ Ἀθηναίων; πολλοῦ γε καὶ δεῖ. ἀλλ' εὔχετο μὲν τοῖς θεοῖς, ἐλάμβανεν δὲ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ συνεπινευόντων ἐκείνων

It has to be said that Maximus' position is ambiguous: from the definition he gives of prayer as conversation (ὁμιλία) and discussion (διάλεκτος) with the gods, as well as a demonstration of virtue (ἐπίδειξις τῆς ἀρετῆς), we expect him to dismiss petitionary prayer in favour of a prayer conceived as meditation or adoration; however, he gives the example of Socrates who asked the gods for spiritual things. Another ambiguity, the like of which we came across with Marcus Aurelius: Socrates prays that he will receive spiritual things, that, in any case, he receives from himself—doubtless, like Marcus Aurelius, Maximus believes that that which is within our control is also within the control of the gods.

Appropriation of Traditional Petitionary Prayer in Late Antiquity

I do not wish, however, to finish this analysis of pagan prayer with an acknowledgement of ambiguity. Indeed, more often than not, learned pagans of late Antiquity put up with traditional petitionary prayer, because the philosophical system they claim to follow affords them that possibility. It is true in the case of Stoicism: we saw that Seneca asked the gods for health of the body. At almost the same time, Musonius Rufus, taking up the traditional question *Is Marriage a Handicap for the Pursuit of Philosophy?*, establishes that marriage must be sought after, because "the gods watch over it" (namely Hera, Eros, Aphrodite), that "it is appropriate to pray when one is thinking of approaching marriage" (XIV 9); how can Musonius then account for traditional religion? It is because Stoicism gives the latter a positive value, the gods of polytheism being in his eyes a way of representing the gifts of nature, moral qualities, or the elements of the world; in this instance, Hera is air, Aphrodite and Eros the passion of love. Pagan religion is thus a popular way of reaching wisdom.

ἀρετὴν ψυχῆς καὶ ἡσυχίαν βίου καὶ ζωὴν ἄμεμπτον καὶ εὔελπιν θάνατον, τὰ θαυμαστὰ δῶρα, τὰ θεοῖς δοτά. ἐὰν δέ τις παρὰ μὲν τῆς γῆς εὔπλοιαν αἰτῇ, παρὰ δὲ τῆς θαλάττης εὐκαρπίαν, καὶ παρὰ μὲν ὑφάντου ἄροτρον, παρὰ δὲ τέκτονος χλανίδα, ἄπεισιν ἀτελὴς καὶ ἄδωρος καὶ ἄτευκτος. ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ καὶ Ἄπολλον, ἐθῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπίσκοποι, φιλοσόφων ὑμῖν μαθητῶν δεῖ, οἳ τὴν ὑμετέραν τέχνην ἐρρωμέναις ψυχαῖς ὑποδεξάμενοι ἄμητον βίου καλὸν καὶ εὐδαίμονα ἐκκαρπώσονται· ἀλλά ἐστιν σπάνιον μὲν τὸ τῆς γεωργίας ταύτης χρῆμα, μόλις δὲ καὶ ὀψὲ παραγινόμενον. δεῖ γε μὴν τοῦ σπανίου τούτου καὶ ὀλίγου ἐναύσματος τῷ βίῳ ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλοις σώμασιν φανταζομένου, ὡς ἐν νυκτὶ πολλῇ δεῖ φωτὸς ὀλίγου· τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει οὐ πολύ, φιλεῖ γε μὴν πρὸς τοῦ ὀλίγου τούτου σώζεσθαι τὰ πάντα. ἂν δ' ἐξέλῃς τοῦ βίου φιλοσοφίαν, ἐξεῖλες αὐτοῦ τὸ ζώπυρον, τὸ ἔμπνουν, τὸ ζωτικόν, τὸ μόνον εὔχεσθαι ἐπιστάμενον· ὡς ψυχὴν σώματος ἐὰν ἀφέλῃς, ἔπηξας τὸ σῶμα· ὡς καρποὺς γῆς ἐὰν ἀφέλῃς, τὴν γῆν ἐξέτεμες· ὡς ἥλιον ἡμέρας, τὴν ἡμέραν ἔσβεσας.

Neoplatonism witnesses a recovery close to traditional beliefs. In his *Reply to the Epistle of Porphyry to Anebo*, Iamblichus distinguishes three forms (εἶδος) of prayer: the first is "the introductory", and "leads to contact and acquaintance with the divine"; the second "is conjunctive, producing a union of sympathetic minds, and calling forth benefactions sent down by the gods even before we express our requests"; the third, the "most perfect, has as its mark ineffable unification, which establishes all authority in the gods, and provides that our souls rest completely in them";[28] to these three types of prayer correspond three advantages: the first concerns illumination (ἐπίλαμψις), the second, collaborative work (κοινὴ ἀπεργασία), the third, perfect repletion through fire (τελεία ἀποπλήρωσις ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός). Though the first and the third forms of prayer have nothing to do with petitionary prayer, the second form defines the aforementioned petitionary prayer as a union of community between those praying and the gods, in which the gods grant their gifts faster than our words or our thoughts. The nature of these gifts is not specified; what we know of Iamblichus from elsewhere permits us to assume that they are principally spiritual gifts, but we must not exclude material gifts.

I shall now move on to Proclus. Plato's *Timaeus* presents at its start a prayer to the gods. No surprise, then, if Proclus' *Commentaries on the* Timaeus *of Plato* also contains a development on that prayer, which is a true treatise on prayer. Proclus distinguishes five steps to a perfect prayer: the knowledge (γνῶσις) of all the divine orders to which he who prays approaches; the conformation or accommodation (οἰκείωσις) of our life with that which is divine; the contact (συναφή) with the divine, that is to say inclining our souls towards the divine essence; the adhesion or immediate vicinity (ἐμπέλασις), which marks a progression in our participation with the divine; and finally, the union (ἕνωσις) with the divine.[29] The first step broadly corresponds with the first step of Iamblichus; the third, fourth and fifth steps could be analysed as a breaking into three of Iamblichus' third step. So is there any correspondence between Proclus' conformation and Iamblichus' second step? Yes, because conformation with the gods means that "through which our concerns being introduced to the Gods, we shall attract their beneficence".[30] A little further on, Proclus defines perfection in prayer thus: "it commences from the more common goods and ends in divine unification".[31] To finish, he distinguishes four modes of prayer:

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28 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* v 26, 237.12–238.5 (transl. E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon, J.P. Hershbell). See Dillon (2002) [= *supra*, pp. 7–25].

29 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 211.10–212.1.

30 See Dillon (1973), 407–411.

31 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 213.4–5.

> Moreover the *modes* of prayer are of various kinds and we distinguish them as follows. There are modes *in accordance with the genera and species of the gods*, prayer then being either creative or purificatory or vivificatory. (1) It is *creative*, for example, [when it takes place] on behalf of rain and wind. The creative gods are in fact the causes of the generation of these, and the prayers of the Eudanemoi at Athens are directed towards these gods. (2) Prayers are *purificatory* when they avert pestilential diseases or all manner of pollution, such [prayers] as we find inscribed in temples. (3) They can be *vivificatory*, as in the case of prayers on behalf of the growth of crops which worship the causes of the growth of life that are superior to us. (4) There are also *perfective* prayers, because it is towards these classes of [perfecting] gods that they lift us up.[32]

A word of commentary: for Proclus, perfect prayer is uniting oneself with the divine, but that doesn't prevent us from keeping the petitionary prayer, notably prayer for spiritual things and for the health of the soul. Above all, it does not exclude in any way more material petitionary prayers for things like rain, wind, illnesses, harvests, health of the body and external things. Without doubt Socrates and the Platonic tradition of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE would have been slightly taken aback by this faithfulness to a more popular religion. But Proclus has at his disposition a philosophical and religious system that allows him to keep the apparently baser elements of polytheism: from the One emanates an entire hierarchy of intelligible and intelligent gods, which corresponds with the gods of polytheism. Unlike monotheist religions, for whom there are no other gods than the unique god they proclaim, Neoplatonism states that the concept of One constitutes the correct way of speaking of God, and that there is a multitude of gods emanating from this One God.[33]

This return to force of traditional petitionary prayer among the learned pagans at the end of Antiquity is probably due to their willingness to resist

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32 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 213.19–214.13 (transl. D.T. Runia, M. Share): καὶ τοὺς τρόπους τῶν εὐχῶν ἀφοριζόμεθα πολυειδεῖς ὄντας, τοὺς μὲν κατὰ γένη καὶ εἴδη τῶν θεῶν· δημιουργικὴ γάρ ἐστιν εὐχὴ καὶ καθαρτικὴ καὶ ζῳοποιός· δημιουργικὴ μέν, οἷον ὑπὲρ ὄμβρων καὶ ἀνέμων· οἱ γὰρ δημιουργοὶ τῆς τούτων αἴτιοι γενέσεως· καὶ αἱ τῶν Εὐδανέμων εὐχαὶ παρὰ Ἀθηναίοις πρὸς τούτους ἐγίνοντο τοὺς θεούς. καθαρτικαὶ δέ, αἱ ἐπὶ ἀποτροπαῖς λοιμικῶν νοσημάτων ἢ παντοίων μολυσμῶν, οἵας δὴ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἔχομεν ἀναγεγραμμένας. ζῳοποιοὶ δέ, ὡς αἱ ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν καρπῶν γενέσεως θεραπεύουσαι τοὺς κρείττονας ἡμῶν τῆς ζῳογονίας αἰτίους· καὶ τελεσιουργοί, διότι πρὸς τὰς τάξεις ταύτας ἡμᾶς ἀνατείνουσι τῶν θεῶν.

33 Bendinelli (1997) analyses texts on prayer of the Neoplatonic tradition (Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus) with the aim of comparing them with Origen's treatise *On Prayer*.

the rise of Christianity and to rediscover their pagan roots. This manifests itself in a literary form of piety that until then had been relatively strange to the concept of requesting things from the gods: hymns. Of course, Plato considered these religious chants as prayers sung to the gods (*Laws* 700b). And of course, the aim of all hymns is to be favourable to the gods of whose kind deeds they sing. But actually they contain relatively few explicit requests: of the twelve *Homeric Hymns* that have survived in a text that is sufficiently long, only three end with a request (the *Hymn to Demeter*, the *Hymn to Earth, the mother of all* and the *Hymn to the Sun* (*Helios*)),[34] and still this request is quite general: "grant comfortable livelihood in return for my singing" (*Hymn to Demeter*); "grant comfortable livelihood in return for my singing" (*Hymn to Earth*); "grant comfortable livelihood" (*Hymn to Helios*).[35] On the other hand, in Neoplatonism, the hymn always contains a petitionary prayer: this is the case in the seven *Hymns* of Proclus, and the anonymous *Hymn to Ares* that is part of the corpus of *Homeric Hymns*. Furthermore, the request is personalised: Proclus prays that he will obtain illumination of the soul, health of the body, gifts of the Muses, the ostracising of unhappiness (*Hymn to Helios*), the mastering of desires (*Hymn to Aphrodite*), wisdom (*Hymn to the Muses*), the revelation of the rites and mysteries contained in the *Chaldean Oracles* (*Hymn to the gods of the Chaldean Oracles*), deliverance from earthly passions (*Hymn to Aphrodite of Lycia*), deliverance from sickness, illumination and piety (*Hymn to Hecate and Ianus*). Here is the very concrete request found at the end of the *Hymn to Athena*: "Give calm winds to the boat of my existence, children, a wife, fame, happiness, wonderful joy, the art of persuasion, the pleasure of conversations with friends, a quick wit, courage to face the obstacles of my life, the place of honour among people."

Only one Neoplatonic hymn does not contain a request: the *Hymn to the Transcendence of God*, but it is without doubt a Christian poem, whose author may be Pseudo-Dionysius. The fact that the hymn is from then on taken over by petitionary prayer is doubtless explained by the change in status of this literary form: it has lost its character of collective liturgy and now comes under personal prayer, in which he who prays can express himself in confidence before the gods.

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34 The *Hymn to Ares*, which ends with a long request, is in fact a Neoplatonic hymn. See Saffrey (1994), 75.

35 The translations are borrowed from the Loeb translation of M.L. West. From the 3rd century, three of the six *Hymns* of Callimachus contain an explicit, although brief, request (*Hymn to Zeus, Hymn for the Bath of Pallas, Hymn to Demeter*).

Conclusion

I shall sum up and conclude. Traditional pagan prayer is a prayer of request. It was the object of criticism from very early on, criticism that focused on its danger, immorality, ridiculousness, mediocrity, egotism and the conflicting character of the requests. More philosophical arguments were also used, which invoked the idea that we must align ourselves more closely with the perfection of God and his providence. This virulent criticism does not, however, result in the rejection of petitionary prayer, but in its transformation and spiritualisation, from Pythagoras, Socrates, and the ancient Platonic tradition. We find a higher form of this petitionary prayer in the Stoic tradition, with Maximus of Tyre, and in Neoplatonism. However, along with this transformed petitionary prayer, Stoicism and Neoplatonism keep the older petitionary prayer for material goods, although on a lower level, because the thought system that they follow allows popular religion and philosophical wisdom to coexist.

To conclude, I would like to return to the *rapprochement* between paganism and Christianity that I sketched out at the beginning of this essay. We find with the Greek Fathers of the Church two definitions of prayer: as "conversation" (ὁμιλία) with God,[36] and as "ascent" (ἀνάβασις) towards God.[37] I note first of all that these two definitions do not exclude petitionary prayer for material goods or for spiritual gifts, even though it is clear that this is not the most perfect form of prayer; in this way, we find again, at least in spirit, the analyses of Maximus of Tyre or the Neoplatonists, affirming the greatest perfection of religio-philosophical prayer in relation to petitionary prayer. Secondly, I would like to reflect quickly on the definitions themselves. André Méhat put forward the hypothesis that the first dates back, prior to Maximus of Tyre (see the development I cited at the end of my second section), to a lost treatise of Aristotle, *On Prayer*.[38] Without contradicting this suggestion, I note that, in Plato's *Laws*, the Stranger claims that "the most useful thing for a happy life, is conversation with the gods (τὸ προσομιλεῖν θεοῖς)" (716 D); thus the definition of Aristotle, if it can really be attributed to him, comes directly from Plato. On the other hand, Alain Le Boulluec is right to insist on the Biblical roots of the concept of prayer as "conversation": the Old and New Testaments contain numerous

36 See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII 39, 6; 42, 1; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, PG 44, 1124 B; Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer* 3 (under the name of Nilus of Ancyra).

37 See Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer* 35; John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* III 39.

38 Méhat (1995).

conversations between man and God.[39] As for the second definition, André Méhat claims that Evagrius Ponticus, who was writing at the end of the 4th century CE, is without doubt the creator, even though he takes up themes that are present in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and Méhat nevertheless maintains that the roots of this definition are Biblical. As Méhat himself warns, however, the Platonic tradition of *the Symposium*, of *Phaedrus* and of the *Republic* contain closely related themes. Above all, the Neoplatonists give a terminology that is very close, but not identical: Iamblichus speaks of the "elevating" (ἀναγωγόν) character of prayer (*De myst.* V 26); Proclus develops the theme of prayer as the "elevation" and the "return" (ἄνοδος) of the soul towards God (*In Tim.* II 212.2–6). Of course, if neither one used the term ἀνάβασις, then unless a pagan source is found that uses this terminology, it would appear to be specific to Christianity, perhaps due to a desire to distance itself from paganism, whilst referring to it discreetly. Whatever the reason, Christian terminology is in agreement with that of the Neoplatonists; after all is said and done, they both belong to the same philosophical traditions. Therefore, it is possible to say that the two Christian definitions of prayer have their roots both in the Bible and in pagan tradition. That is to say, that the relationship between paganism and Christianity certainly cannot be considered in a simplistic manner.

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Philo on Prayer as Devotional Study

Menahem Luz

Philo's concept of prayer is atypical of his age and very much *sui generis*. His mind revolved in two separate, but briefly contiguous spheres: that of Jewish thought at the close of the second Temple period—and that of Alexandrian philosophy at the opening of the Greco-Roman era.[1] However, he is atypical not only in the way he skilfully, though not always consistently, combined these two modes of thought, but also in the manner in which he is unrepresentative of either on its own. As an exponent of Greek philosophy, his application of philosophical argumentation to Biblical discussion naturally sets him apart from other Middle Platonic thinkers,[2] whose ideas he develops in the sphere of the cosmic *nous*, allegorical interpretation and moral philosophy, making innovative contributions regarding the place of repentance and prayer.[3] On the other hand, in the sphere of Judaism, his Biblical and theological notions left little impact on later rabbinic thought.[4] Latterly, his position has been understood as part of what is now termed "Middle Judaism" and, in his case, characteristic of the Hellenistic cultural scene of Alexandria in the later inter-testament period.[5]

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1 See: Winston (2010), I. 235–239 on his debt to Greek philosophy in general; Billings (1919), caps. III–V on that to Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics for his theology and ethics; Dillon (1977), 145–183 and Timotin (2012), 99, 100–112 on his contribution to "Middle Platonism"; Leonhardt (2001), 5–6 in respect to his Greek and Jewish traditions.

2 Historically speaking, "there is no evidence that he had any influence on the course of Middle Platonism" (Dillon (1977), 144). Although this changed in the hands of Christian writers for whom Philo's ideas served in many matters as a precedent (Runia (2009), 210–230), scholars have also examined his connection with New Testament thought (Siegert (2009), 175–209; Troiani (2003), 90–24).

3 See: Radice (2009), 144–145; Levy (2009), 154–171. On his philosophical innovations, see: Wolfson (1967), II. 152–153, 237.

4 As a "thoroughly Hellenized Jew" (Winston (2010), 236), he had little impact on Jewish thought (Amir (1972), 415) and not in the medieval period (Schatz (2003), 26; Sirat (1996), 6–7). Although general comparisons are still made between his thought and rabbinic literature (Winston (2009), 231–253), his direct influence is easier to identify in later Christian thought (Runia (2005), cap. 10).

5 Middle Judaism is set between 300 BCE–200 CE covering the activity of writers both of *Eretz Israel* and the Diaspora (Termini (2009), 95–96). In Philo's case, we are speaking of the Hellenistic Jewish milieu of Alexandria (Hadas-Lebel (2102), cap. 3). On Jewish Alexandria in general, see: Gruen (2004), cap. 2; Tcherikover (1970), caps. 2, 4.

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We do know of other Jewish authors of Alexandria who used Greek philosophical terms in order to explain Biblical concepts, but Philo goes further by using Biblical concepts as a base to develop his Greek philosophy and in this role has a more universal and unusual role to play.[6] His predecessors, particularly the 2nd–1st BCE Jewish thinkers, Aristobulus of Paneas and Artapanus, offer interesting parallels to Philo's interpretation of the Bible.[7] However, from what we may judge from their meager fragments, this was mainly a piece-meal job lacking Philo's attempt to form a unitary philosophy of their own.[8] References to Greek philosophy are also noted in many Jewish *Apocryphal* compositions of this period although here too lacking a systematic exposition of philosophical principles.[9]

These conclusions are no less true of Philo's understanding of the moral purpose of prayer and its religious function in divine worship. As noted by earlier scholars, Philo's contribution to moral philosophy lies in the addition of faith, humanity, repentance, prayer and scriptural study to such traditional Greek virtues as courage, justice and nobility of soul.[10] In this too he has more in common with thought developed in "Middle Judaism" outside of the cult in the Temple of Jerusalem. In the latter, emphasis was placed on sacrifice and ritual prayer, rather than contemplation and study.[11] In this period, God's "ser-

6 Schatz (2003), 26–27; Wolfson (1967), 151–152. Furthermore, his understanding of the Pentateuch is often peculiar to himself (Amir (1973), 3).

7 On the first, see: Kleine Pauly 5 1577 s.v. 'Aristobulos' (8); Stern I (1974). 93, 404–405, II (1980), 209. On the second, see: Neue Pauly 2 s. 45 s.v. 'Artapanos'; BNJ 726; Stern I (1974) 157, 51A 23, II (1980), 173 & addend. 690. They too recall neo-Pythagorean, Antisthenean and Stoic elements, often intertwined with a claim that it was the Bible that in turn had influenced the Greeks and other peoples. Discussion in: Gruen (2004), 201–212, 221–225; Rajak (1973), 796; Gutmann (1973), 443–445; Schalit (1973), 645–646; Cohen (1995), 20–22. Cleanthes could well be the source for the Antisthenean ideas in the Stoa (Luz (1994), 114–121) used by Philo and his predecessors.

8 Schatz (2003), 26, but in the opinion of Hadas-Lebel (2012), caps. 7–8, his exegetical work was not radically new in his time (p. 154), but this does not mean that his philosophy was totally derivative.

9 The exception is perhaps Philo's near contemporary IV *Maccabees* that had a philosophical agenda of its own, using historical and semi-historical characters of its narrative to exemplify the traditional (mostly Stoic) virtues of Greek philosophy but not as part of a wider philosophical scheme.

10 On the ethical and cosmological unity of ideas in his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, see: Radice (2000), 25–64; Wolfson (1967), II. 218, 237 whose interesting comparison with ps.-Andronicus' *Affct.* on piety as part of justice has not been upheld (Gilbert-Thirry (1977), 5, 25, 122).

11 Even taking into account contemporary synagogues in Jerusalem, these should still be

vice" (*'avodah*) had special significance in regards to the λειτουργία ("service") practised there—*i.e.* not so much to spoken prayer as "service" came to be later re-interpreted in the Rabbinic and post-destruction period—as the religious ritual and formulae accompanying animal and cereal offerings.[12] However, it has been noted that, in Alexandria of this period, these rituals had little impact on the daily lives of the Jews, where prayer-houses (προσευκτήρια) functioned as the centre of their social and religious "assemblies" (συναγωγαί).[13] For many Diaspora Jews of this period, a pilgrimage to the relatively remote Temple in Jerusalem would have been onerous and sometimes personally impossible.[14] Even for the thousands who did make the journey to pray and sacrifice, it would have often been in many cases an exceptional occasion rather than an annual event as it had been for those abiding in *Eretz Israel* in this period. Pilgrimage is always dependent on personal and other factors, but Philo does describe such a visit on one occasion.[15] However, on philosophical reflection, he did not view the Temple ritual (λειτουργία) as sufficient in itself for acceptance by God while the institution of the earthly Temple was a mere reflection of that in heaven.[16] Philo's compromise was to interpret the significance of Temple sac-

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seen as institutions outside of Temple activities. On the communities even more remote from its influence, see: Gruen (2004), 120–121; Leonhardt (2001), cap. 1.

12 Cf. *BAGD s.v.* The *LXX* often uses λειτουργία (normally: "public service") in the sense of service (*'avodah*) to God, or service in his Tabernacle and Temple—*e.g., LXX Nu.* 4:24: λειτουργία ... λειτουργεῖν (= *'avodath ... l'avod*). The modern meaning of solely prayer "liturgy" is absent though the spoken formulae of religious rite usually accompanied Temple ritual just as also Rabbinic spoken prayer/benediction had to accompany a rite—as, for instance, the benediction over wine had to be accompanied by drinking of wine, and *vice versa*.

13 Schwartz (2009), 17–18; Reif (1993), cap. 2. The synagogue was no rival to the Temple and not yet conceived as a replacement, but still seen as "complementary" to it and more of a centre of civic and study activity in contrast to the Jewish Temple at Leontopolis, for example, that was possibly still active (Gruen (2004), 120–121).

14 Gruen (2002), 234–235 (on diaspora as homeland of Jews), 246–247 (on those that did travel).

15 *Prov.* fr. 2.64: his language is vague in that "he was being despatched" (*viz.* for the community?) or "preparing himself" (ἐστελλόμην) for a (private) visit to the Temple to pray—or make vows—and sacrifice (εὐξόμενός τε καὶ θύσων). If this had been a regular pilgrimage and not a specific visit, one would have expected some indication of this in his language. Furthermore, if the sense is despatch on behalf of a community, we could understand εὐξόμενός as referring to some consecratory vow (*neder*) rather than prayer (*tefilah*).

16 On his criticism of the earthly temple, cf. esp. *Plant.* 126; Schwartz (2009), 11–12; Wolfson (1967), II. 243–244. On the Temple in Heaven in Philo and his Jewish contemporaries, see: Barker (1991), 70–102.

rifice on a symbolic level. A virtuous and pious life is expressed through the word (*logos*) of prayer and study rather than the daily ritual of sacrifice since prayer aspired to a higher level. He thus reserves the term "religious worship" (λατρεία) for the goal of the virtuous and religious.[17] His praise is especially for the "the civic synagogues", which he understood principally as "schools" (διδασκαλεῖα) for the study of virtue and correction of our attitude to Man and God.[18] However, the rhetorical form in which this is raised—what are the synagogues other than places of study?—suggests that this is an interpretation phrased as such for the philosophical listener. Epigraphic evidence from this period *does* echo this usage, but with less philosophical connotations, testifying that at least one Jerusalem synagogue had been established "for the reading of the law and teaching (διδαχή) of the commandments".[19] Likewise is Philo's understanding of synagogue activity. He glosses over any liturgical aspect describing how every seventh day Jews come to these holy places called synagogues where the young listen and *learn* from the elders who read from the Holy Scriptures.[20] These *lessons* are a contemplative form of devotion (εὐχαί) and a type of philosophical education.[21] Elsewhere, he describes their use as places for the recitation and interpretation (ὑφηγεῖται) of a weekly portion of the scripture by whoever in the prayer house was versed in it.[22] However, the regular term used for the synagogues themselves—*viz*. "prayer-houses" (προσευκτήρια) and "(places of) prayer" (εὐχαί/ προσευχαί)—makes it clear that prayer rather than teaching was their original if not primary function in practice. However, although we know of instances from the Bible concerning the custom—if not duty—of reciting

17 Cf. *BAGD s.v.*; Leonhardt (2001), 10–17.

18 *Moses* 2.216: τὰ γὰρ κατὰ πόλεις προσευκτήρια τί ἕτερόν ἐστιν ἢ διδασκαλεῖα φρονήσεως καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης εὐσεβείας τε καὶ ὁσιότητος καὶ συμπάσης ἀρετῆς, ᾗ κατανοεῖται καὶ κατορθοῦται τά τε ἀνθρώπεια καὶ θεῖα. See also Spec. Leg. II 61: ἀναπέπταται γοῦν ταῖς ἑβδόμαις μυρία κατὰ πᾶσαν πόλιν διδασκαλεῖα φρονήσεως καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν.

19 Cf. the famous pre-destruction synagogue inscription describing how Theodotus: ᾠκο|δόμησε τὴν συναγωγὴν εἰς ἀν[άγν]ω|σ[ιν] νόμου καὶ εἰς [δ]ιδαχ[ὴ]ν ἐντολῶν supplying it also with pilgrim and ritual facilities (*CIJ* 2. 1404), but notably omitting the mention of prayer; text in: Roth-Gerson (1987), no. 19.

20 *Quod prob. sit* 81–82: εἰς ἱεροὺς ἀφικνούμενοι τόπους, οἳ καλοῦνται συναγωγαί … εἶθ' εἷς μέν τις τὰς βίβλους ἀναγινώσκει λαβών, ἕτερος δὲ τῶν ἐμπειροτάτων ὅσα μὴ γνώριμα παρελθὼν ἀναδιδάσκει. A set weekly portion need *not* have been practised at least not in its modern form.

21 *Legat*. 156: ἠπίστατο οὖν καὶ προσευχὰς ἔχοντας καὶ συνιόντας εἰς αὐτάς, καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς ἱεραῖς ἑβδόμαις, ὅτε δημοσίᾳ τὴν πάτριον παιδεύονται φιλοσοφίαν.

22 *Spec. Leg*. II 62: ἀναστὰς δέ τις τῶν ἐμπειροτάτων ὑφηγεῖται τὰ ἄριστα καὶ συνοίσοντα.

daily prayers by the individual,[23] nothing is known of its content. Nonetheless, the very existence of "prayer-houses" and even "synagogue assemblies" at this period still implies the participation of a congregation—or whatever *quorum* (*minyan*) may have been required to comprise it. Yet, if they recited their prayers merely as individuals who happened to be together in the same building for study purposes, then the latter would have been known only secondarily as προσευκτήρια.

Nonetheless, many modern scholars have expressed doubt concerning any organized congregational liturgy prior to the Talmudic period,[24] some arguing for complete skepticism regarding the content of Jewish prayer during the second Temple era.[25] Although Mishnaic texts mention (daily) recitation of the Decalogue and sundry benedictions, followed by at least some verses of the *Shema*,[26] the question still arises whether this primarily referred to daily rituals of the Temple as the context indicates, or if it was also customary outside of it. Furthermore, even if this custom was in use in Philo's period, were such prayers to be recited as an individual, or as part of a congregation? The daily recitation of some specific scriptural passages—particularly the *Shema*, perhaps accompanied by benedictions—could have been customary in Philo's era although direct proof is lacking.[27] There is also evidence for special thanksgiving festivals

23 Cf. *Dan.* 6: 11 on the custom if not duty of daily prayer.

24 Scholars are split between views ranging from the strictly traditional who maintain the antiquity of the modern Jewish liturgy (Hertz (1955), xi), those who detect in Philo's works later formulae of traditional Jewish prayers as the *shema* (*Deut.* 6: 4–9. 11: 13–21, *Nu.* 15:37–41) and the Passover *haggadah* (Cohen (1995), caps. 6, 8), and modernists who maintain that the formulae and content of Jewish prayer were still evolving between the late 6th–8th centuries CE (Hoffman (1979), 5, 16).

25 Modernists have questioned whether any fixed congregational liturgy existed before Gamaliel I—or at least in its 2nd century CE fluid formats (Reif (2006), 3–4, 27–31, cap. 3).

26 *Mishnah* (*Tam.* 5.1) describing how a Temple warden directed the priests to recite the Decalogue, the *Shema* (*Deut.* 6: 4–9, 11: 13–21, *Nu.* 15: 37–41) and sundry blessings; but outside of the Temple, this custom was said to be that of "sectarians" and not upheld in Rabbinic Judaism (*Talmud Jer. Berachot* 9b). The 2nd BCE Nash papyrus fragment is sometimes cited as proof of *similar* combinations, but it is no longer believed to come from a book of liturgy, but a phylactery, which only indicates the sanctity of these texts rather than their obligatory daily recitation.

27 The *Shema* includes not only the basic *credo* of Judaism concerning God's unity (*Deut.* 6: 4), but also specific instructions for the daily recitation of that very passage (6: 7). However, it is only in the Rabbinic period that the main bulk of the daily prayers and benedictions came to be established.

some even celebrated only by the Alexandrian community.[28] However, there is no evidence for prayers spoken by the congregation in unison other than in response to the words of the reader.[29] Philo's own evidence is unclear and has been described as drawn from an amalgam of traditions.[30] That individuals in Alexandria recited their prayers in Greek is also possible since early Mishnaic authorities recognized this practice in a synagogue of Caesarea slightly later, but possibly, the leader of the synagogue would not have done so.[31]

Setting aside the problem of the content of prayer in this period, Philo is much clearer on its moral value and its place in his philosophy. In his fragmentary treatise, *On Virtues* (περὶ ἀρετῶν), Philo expounds on six moral virtues that exemplify service to God: justice, courage, piety, humanity, repentance, and nobility (of spirit).[32] To these is added the virtue of prayer examined in his fragmentary treatise *On Prayers and Benedictions* (περὶ εὐχῶν καὶ εὐλογιῶν).[33] As in the Greek translation of the *LXX*, Philo employs the variants εὐχή and προσευχή to refer to the Biblical notion of "prayer" (i.e. *tefilah*) in general.[34] However, he also uses the same Greek variants to denote the Biblical consecratory vow

28 See: Leonhardt (2001). 48–49; Gruen (2002), 68–69 (on prayers for the Ptolemies), 116–117 (on special hymns of thanksgiving on the reversal of Gaius' decrees in *Flacc*. 121–124).

29 Perhaps clearer is the case of blessings received by a congregation, who would be a recipient of a blessing not as individuals, but as a gathering. Rabbinic liturgy later incorporated the Priestly Blessing (*Nu*. 6: 24–26) as part of the liturgy on the analogy of the daily Temple Blessings (*Mishna Tamid* 5.1), but a 600 BCE fragment of a version of has recently been discovered in Katef Hinom showing that versions of this blessing were revered as early as the First Temple Period.

30 Leonhardt (2001), 280–282.

31 Cf. the reading of the *shema* in the language of the *alonistin*, *viz*. Hellenistim (*TJ Sutah* 7:1 21b); and perhaps *TB Suta* 49b on Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek as the languages permitted for prayer. Similarly, *Acts* 2: 9–11 details a motley of languages employed by individuals for praising God (11–12).

32 "Justice" is examined in *On Special Laws* (*De spec*. IV. 136–150), but the opening of *On Virtues* refers to it as immediately preceding (*Vrt*. 1). The latter is divided by the editor (Cohn, vol. V) into five separate treatises: on courage and piety (περὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ εὐσεβείας) of which only on courage survives in c. 1–50; on humanity (περὶ φιλανθρωπίας) in c. 50–174; on repentance (περὶ μετανοίας) in c. 175–186); and on nobility (περὶ εὐγενείας) in c. 187–227.

33 Today this treatise is preserved following a lacuna in the final section of *On Rewards and Punishments* (περὶ ἄθλων καὶ ἐπιτιμίων),), but is edited as an independent treatise (c. 79–126) entitled by the editor, *De Benedictionibus* (περὶ εὐχῶν καὶ εὐλογιῶν, Cohn vol. V p. 353, *ap. crit*.). It is immediately followed by a lengthy discourse *On Execrations* (127–172). Philo's precedents are apparently the Biblical examples of divine reward and retribution coupled with the Biblical lists of Blessings and Execrations (*Deut*. 11: 26 seq.).

34 Wolfson (1967), II. 237–252; Leonhardt (2001), 101, 104–108.

(*neder*).[35] Some have pointed to the ambiguity of the *LXX* as a cause—and others to Philo's rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew.[36] Yet others refer to the usage of εὐχή in spoken Greek.[37] Whatever the case, Philo created out of this terminological ambiguity an entirely new unity of concept: that all prayer was a type of thanksgiving to God.[38] The same applies:

1. to prayers of thanks-giving (χαριστία/εὐχαριστία);[39]
2. hymns of praise (αἴνεσις);[40]
3. and blessing as a form of benediction (εὐλογία).[41]

In later Rabbinic Judaism, Psalms of Praise (*hallel*)—*viz*. the Biblical *Ps*. 113–118—acquired an important place in festive liturgy.[42] Philo's interest, however, is not in the formal genres of liturgy as in their unity of purpose: *being* grateful to God and recognizing him as worthy of praise.

In the treatise *On Noah's Plantation*,[43] he even characterizes gratitude to God as the sacred aspect of the virtues, "amongst which being grateful is one of

35 Cf. *Sacr*. 53.4 ἐὰν εὔξῃ εὐχήν (= *LXX Deut*. 23: 2 2— *tiddor neder*). in relation to *Alleg*. I.17 τὴν μεγάλην εὐχὴν εὐξαμένου (= *LXX Num*. 6: 2). On the problem of "prayers and vows of the soul" (*Leg. Alleg*. II. 63: εὐχαὶ καὶ οἱ ὁρισμοὶ τῆς ψυχῆς) in ref. to *Num*. 30: 5 ("vows and pledges"), see: Cacciari (2003), 149; Leonhardt (2001), 117–121, 168; Wolfson (1967), II. 239–241.

36 See: Nikiprowetzky (1997), cap. 3 on Philo's knowledge of Hebrew; Dell'Acqua (2003). 25–52 on his text and the Septuagint.

37 Thus εὐχή as both a prayer and a *votive* offering in pagan temple.

38 *Immut*. 87: ἔστι δὲ εὐχὴ μὲν αἴτησις ἀγαθῶν παρὰ θεοῦ, μεγάλη δὲ εὐχὴ τὸν θεὸν αἴτιον ἀγαθῶν αὐτὸν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ νομίζειν. See: Larson (1946), 186–187 on the vow as "both petition and thanksgiving": εὐχὴ μὲν οὖν ἐστιν αἴτησις ἀγαθῶν παρὰ θεοῦ (*Sac*. I 25);).

39 *E.g*., *Ebr*. 121 (τὸν ἐπινίκιον καὶ εὐχαριστικὸν ὕμνον ᾄδοντος χοροῦ, *i.e*. song of Salvation and Thanksgiving). See: Leonhardt (2001), 142–174; Wolfson (1967), II. 239. On *eucharistia* as liturgy, a point criticised by other scholars, see: Laporte (1983), cap. 2, who traces Philo's use back to the Temple.

40 Praise and thanksgiving are originally separate genres, as in the Qumran *tehilat shevaḥ* (Martínez—Tigchelaar (2000), 4Q400 p. 808) and hymns of *hodayah* (*e.g*., Licht (1957), 57–64) with αἴνεσις strictly referring to Song of Praise, but Philo does not distinguish between them: αἴνεσιν καὶ ὕμνους καὶ θεοπρεπεῖς ᾠδάς (*Leg. Alleg*. III. 26) in ref. to *LXX Gen*. 49:8 (σὲ αἰνέσαισαν = *yodukha*).

41 Phil. *Alleg*. III.104 speaks of the good character that is the subject of our prayer (εὐχή) in reference to God's promised *blessing* (LXX *Deut*. 28: 12 εὐλογῆσαι = *levarech*).

42 On later synagogue liturgy, see: Kimelman (2005), 1–39.

43 The treatise περὶ τῆς φυτουργίας is a continuation of the previous essay on *Agriculture*, (*Plant*. 183, Wendland, II, p. 94), but its relevance may be seen in relation to the benediction over wine.

them *par excellence*, but the way in which the majority think of thanksgiving through sacrifices and offerings is *no* genuine way to God".[44] The correct way to give thanks to God is, in contrast to these rituals, not one by means of the spoken "voice straining to be heard", but by way of "the formless and purest intellect".[45] Whether or not such thanksgiving and praise should be uttered by means of the sensory organs at all, the activity that Philo here describes is one of intellectual contemplation and silent prayer where the formless nous is activated.[46] The same may be said of the Benedictions (εὐλογίαι) as that said over Judah, who is understood as both blessed and as an intellect actively blessing God (*Plant.* 135) for after incessant study of hymns of praise, he is sustained by a logical and virtuous nature (136).[47] Blessings have always been part of Rabbinic Benedictions and Grace over meals, but Philo seems to refer to the gratitude that a person of moral nature feels towards God at the moment that he is blessing him.

In his view, the study of scripture served as a type of contemplative devotion in itself and at the same time involved a moral duty for the betterment and education of the soul. It is true that general parallels may be suggested with much later Rabbinic understanding of prayer and benedictions as a religious *duty* designed for the individual's betterment as well as a primary devotion to God.[48] However, Philo's argument does not rest on the daily recitation of fixed, specific passages, but on "devotional" study of the Bible as a whole and particularly the *Pentateuch*. Moreover, although Rabbinic thought required constant study of the Bible and Talmud "both day and night", this activity was conceptually distinguished from "prayer" since they also maintained that a life *solely* devoted to prayer lacked moral fulfilment on a social level.[49] Traditionally the 1st century BCE sage, Simeon ben Shetah, was said to have claimed that the

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44 *Plant.* 126: ἑκάστη μέν γε τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐστι χρῆμα ἅγιον, εὐχαριστία δὲ ὑπερβαλλόντως· θεῷ δὲ οὐκ ἔνεστι γνησίως εὐχαριστῆσαι δι' ὧν νομίζουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ κατασκευῶν ἀναθημάτων θυσιῶν.

45 *loc. cit.* ἡ γεγωνὸς … φωνή in contrast to ὁ ἀειδὴς καὶ καθαρώτατος νοῦς. Although some parts of the Jewish liturgy are always read silently (*e.g.*, the xviii Benedictions), there is controversy in different communities on whether other prayers should be uttered aloud or silently.

46 It has been noted that, in contrast to pagan usage, *early* Rabbinic sources also recommend the use of silent prayer (Van der Horst (1994), 12–16) although, in later liturgical usage, vocal prayer was obligatory in many instances.

47 *Plant.* 135: Ἰούδας ὁ εὐλογῶν τὸν θεὸν νοῦς καὶ τὰς εἰς αὐτὸν εὐχαρίστους ὑμνῳδίας ἀπαύστως μελετῶν retaining the Biblical pun on *modeh* (εὐλογῶν) and Judah (*Gen.* 29:35).

48 In general see: *EJ* 13, 981–982 (on 'prayer' in rabbinic thought); Langer-Fine (2005). On its historical development, see: Reif (2006), 72–90.

49 Reif (1993), 95–102 (on its theological status).

world rested on three things: (study of the) *Torah*, (Temple) service (*'avodah*) and good deeds.[50] Liturgy outside of Temple service is notably absent from this list, but study of the scripture does open it.[51] For Philo, however, the study of scripture and inner reflection on its interpretation was a prayer in itself. Similarly, he notes: that following the practical life of youth, the contemplative life of old-age is best and holiest and without contemplative reflection actions are of no moral consequence.[52] Scriptural *lessons* are thus conceived as a contemplative form of devotional study as well as an instruction in themselves.

Philo's analysis of prayer thus treats it as one single nature. Every benediction is an expression of gratitude to God. However, a state of gratitude is acquired through a life of virtue and piety. In his view, the latter may be reached through study and philosophical reflection on scriptural passages. Contemplation of these is thus both a means to attain virtue and an expression of it. As a form of prayer, contemplation expresses that portion of virtue that is gratitude towards God for the gifts of the universe.

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50 *Mishna Avot* 1.2. On his thought and historical background, see: *EJ* XIV 1563–1565. Similarly, R. Simeon ben Gamliel II (2nd CE): On three things the world rests: truth, judgment and peace (*Avoth* 1.11).

51 It assumed a more important place a century after Philo in the instructions given by R. Simeon ben Nathanael (1st–2nd CE) concerning ways to pray (*Mishna Avoth* 1.18). The instructions of the slightly earlier Hanina Segan ha-Kohanim (*EJ* 7, 1266) could refer equally to the last days of Temple liturgy and to the post-destruction period (*Avoth* 3. 2).

52 *Praem. et poen.* 51 (Cohn, V): μετὰ γὰρ τὸν ἐν νεότητι πρακτικὸν βίον ὁ ἐν γήρᾳ θεωρητικὸς βίος ἄριστος καὶ ἱερώτατος … χωρὶς γὰρ θεωρίας ἐπιστημονικῆς οὐδὲν τῶν πραττομένων καλόν.

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Prayer in Maximus of Tyre

*Carl O'Brien**

Introduction

Maximus of Tyre, although hardly an innovative thinker, sheds some light on the general conception of prayer, not just within the Platonic tradition, but also amongst the wider intellectual milieu of the second and third century. *Oration* 5 is a useful source of information concerning prayer in antiquity.[1] However, Maximus also supplies an important insight into the appropriate practice of prayer within a suitable religious context, (as one might expect, since his primary concern is theology and ethics for the general public). One of the major issues facing second (and third) century intellectuals was the false theological beliefs which underpinned incorrect religious behaviour (whether this was prayer, anthropomorphism, use of statues to represent the divine or animal sacrifice), and on this issue Maximus has a great deal to contribute. It is easy to see why this might be a preoccupation for Maximus: incorrect religious practice for him was on a par with a false ethical position insofar as both could corrupt the soul.

However, firstly some remarks about the nature of Maximus' Platonism are in order: The *Suda* refers to him as Πλατωνικός, although, as Trapp notes, in the *Orations*, Maximus never claims an exclusive allegiance to Plato.[2] The Suda reference is supported by Maximus' own words at *Or*. 21.4 ἐγὼ γάρ τοι τά τε ἄλλα καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐλευθερίᾳ πείθομαι Πλάτωνι ("I am persuaded by Plato in his freedom concerning terminology"), although Trapp correctly notes that this has a "purely localized significance": Maximus in this context is appealing to Plato as an authority for his own lack of concern with the employment of technical terminology.[3] Similarly at *Or*. 41.2, Maximus comes down on the side of Homer *and* Plato, as opposed to Epicurus, as suitable sources for approach-

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1 Trapp, M. (1997), lxxxviii points out that Maximus' orations were frequently used for precisely this purpose: for example by Gerard Voss *in De Theologia Gentili* (1641).

2 Trapp, M.B. (1997), xxiii.

3 Trapp. M.B. (1997), xxiii n. 27.

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ing a better understanding of God.[4] On the other hand, the question of whether Maximus is a Platonist or not is something of a moot point for the following reasons: Firstly, he places himself above sectarian divisions: his main concern is to instil an attraction to the philosophical (and therefore, from his point of view, virtuous) life in his audience. Secondly, Maximus is a sophist, not a philosopher: his work is more akin to a volume offering self-help through philosophy, rather than a monograph that might be published by a respectable university press. His comments at *Or*. 11 seem to indicate that his audience have never so much as read a Platonic dialogue.[5] As to whether we should classify him as a Platonist or not, it is clear from *Or*. 11 that he has some kind of special relationship to Platonism, in so far as he assumes the role of exegete of Plato's dialogues and his general world view is Middle Platonic.[6] His attitude to prayer (and the wider issue of correct religious practice), then, is a heavily moralising one, stripped bare of technical philosophical arguments, aimed at a broad public and imbued with Platonic attitudes. Maximus' views, though, are hardly distinctive and his attitudes are typical of second or third century writers. One feature that might be mentioned is the manner in which he ignores Christianity. This in itself is not particularly surprising, but one might note that he taught at Rome during the reign of the Emperor Commodus,[7] whose concubine, Marcia, was a Christian[8]—so this, coupled with Maximus' choices of moral exemplar, which avoid the events of his own day and instead either focus on the Athenian past or literature/mythology, appears to reflect a conscious attempt to avoid contemporary developments in favour of a 'classicising' Hellenocentrism. (In this regard one might argue that he is a typical product of the Second Sophistic, but other near-contemporary authors, such as Lucian or Galen, were more engaged with more recent events.)[9]

4 Elsewhere (e.g. *Or*. 5), though, Maximus criticises Homer's representation of God.

5 This may be a rhetorical flourish, along the lines of St Basil's claim at *Hexaemeron* 7.5–6, 68A–C that his congregation consisted of drunks, gamblers and wife-bashers.

6 Examples of Maximus' Middle Platonic views are his comments on Fate and Providence at *Or*. 13 or the understanding of God which he expresses at *Or*. 11.

7 Suda/Hesychius. s.v. διέτριψε δὲ ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπὶ Κομόδου.

8 Trapp, M.B. (1997), xlvii.

9 Ibid.

On Petitionary Prayer

Maximus (in line with the thinking of his time) is opposed to the practice of petitionary prayer for several reasons. In the first place, material goods should not have any value for one who practises virtue; it is therefore inappropriate to ask a god to assist in their acquisition. A better strategy for the avaricious, instead of praying, would be to run a brothel or turn to piracy or even to engage in trade. Clearly Maximus is being somewhat tendentious here: the point is both that we cannot expect God to supply us with what is not really conducive to our (moral) well-being and what we could obtain by our own actions. In any case, a man who has not attained wisdom would not be content, even if the god answered his prayer: this is illustrated by the example of Midas and his golden touch.[10] Even in cases where an end to suffering, rather than material goods, is prayed for, Maximus has little sympathy with the petitioner, who should adopt a suitable course of action of his own accord, rather than expecting God to intervene. This is illustrated by the example of Philoctetes, praying on account of the horrific pain in his foot. Maximus rather coldly advises "cut it off, man, and stop shouting and abusing your most loyal friends and disturbing the land of the Lemnians".[11] Similarly in the case of the Egyptians, the Nile might provide fertility, but human labour is still required.[12]

A further problem with petitionary prayer is that it would interfere with (Maximus' conception of) the functioning of Providence. We falsely attribute the favourable outcome of our prayers to the working of Providence: "When by deceit or force men obtain what they pray for, but not what they truly desire, they attribute the gift to the gods, even though it was not from the gods that they received it. God does not distribute evils; they are rather the gift of chance coming blindly from their unreasoning source like the cheery greetings of drunkards" (*Or.* 5.1.19–24).[13] Plotinus makes a similar point at *Enn.* IV 4 [28] 40, where favourable outcomes are regarded as the result of petitionary prayers to heavenly bodies. Plotinus does not accept that the prayer has been intentionally answered, although his emphasis is somewhat different from that of Maximus. In Maximus' case, the prayer has no effect: Plotinus

10 This topic is already treated in the spurious *Second Alcibiades* 141a*ff*.

11 *Or.* 7.6. Translations of Maximus are taken from Trapp, M.B. (2007), occasionally with slight modifications.

12 *Or.* 34.4.

13 ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἀπατήσαντες, οἱ δὲ καὶ βιασάμενοι τυχόντες ὧν εὔξαντο, οὐχ ὧν ἐπεθύμουν, ἀνατιθέασιν θεοῖς τὴν δωρεάν, οὐ παρ' ἐκείνων λαβόντες· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν μὴ καλῶν δίδωσιν θεός, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ταῦτα δωρεὰ τύχης, ἄλογος ἀλόγου, οἷαι καὶ <αἱ> παρὰ τῶν μεθυόντων φιλοφροσύναι.

instead sees prayers as having some effect by means of cosmic sympathy,[14] but equates such religious practices with magic, snake charming and the use of love potions.[15]

God cares for the whole, and will not sacrifice its interests to answer the prayers of the individual: Maximus uses the example of a general agreeing to a baggage-handler's request to serve as a hoplite, while the hoplite himself was granted a break—this would not be in the interests of the army as a whole.[16] It would also be as if the limbs of the body were to pray to Medicine that they should not be amputated: God's direction of the world is similar to that of a king, who makes the law of the city, but does not concern himself with every single detail.[17] Although this is often regarded as a Stoic attitude,[18] it reflects Plato's view at *Laws* X 903b–905b, where a similar analogy of a doctor (or a craftsman) orienting his skill at the benefit of the whole is employed. Plato's image is, however, richer: in the same passage God is additionally described as a draught-player, who does no more than position souls into the place most suitable for them (based upon the character which they have previously displayed).

Petitionary prayer contradicts the immutability of God, which is problematic because "if the change is from worse to better, then his original decision was defective; if on the other hand the change is from better to worse, then the change itself is defective. But God and deficiency are incompatible. Or again consider someone praying. Either he deserves to obtain what he has prayed for, or he does not, if he does deserve it, then he will obtain it even if he does not pray for it, if he does not deserve it, then he will not obtain it even if he does pray. If a man is worthy but neglects to pray, he will not be rendered unworthy by that neglect; if he is unworthy of something, but prays to obtain it, his prayer alone cannot make him worthy" (*Or*. 5.3.8–15).[19] Prayers, then, cannot influence

14 The image is further developed at *Enn*. IV 4 [28] 41.

15 For a full discussion of this interesting passage, see Dillon, J.M. (2002), 283–285 [reprinted in this volume, see *supra*, pp. 12–13].

16 *Or*. 5.3. The reference to a *hoplite* is typical of Maximus' anachronistic choice of examples.

17 *Or*. 5.4.

18 For example, Plutarch criticises the Stoics for claiming that the cosmos is a city at *De Comm. Notit*. 1067F and at *De Stoic. Rep*. 1051C, he attributes to Chrysippus the view that the suffering of a few good men in the cosmos is similar to the loss of a small quantity of wheat in a well-run, but large, household. Subsequently at *De Stoic. Rep*. 1051D, the image of God as a king who entrusts the rule of regions of the cosmos to evil governors is tendentiously represented as a Stoic view.

19 εἰ μὲν εἰς τὸ βέλτιον ἐκ τοῦ φαυλοτέρου μετατίθεται, πονήρως ἐβουλεύσατο· εἰ δὲ εἰς τὸ χεῖρον

God: "You will not get round [God] by bringing your appetites to the stand, as if in court, wailing piteously, crying out 'have mercy'" (*Or.* 5.7.20–22).[20] The same idea is already found in Socrates' criticism that Homer depicts the gods as being influenced by prayer.[21]

Maximus does accept that concern for the individual is embraced within a more universal form of theodicy. Returning once again to the kingly imagery, even if God remains motionless like the Great King, he still bestows security (σωτηρία) on his subjects.[22] However, God will bestow what is appropriate, whether petitioned or not. Priam might have prayed, but the adulterous and hubristic Trojans are still punished; just because Croesus prayed to Apollo does not mean that he should conquer the Persian Empire.[23] One is reminded of Plotinus' observation that wars are won by those who fight, not by those who pray.[24] Maximus makes the rather similar claim that freedom is obtained not by farming, but by fighting.[25] Maximus' objection here is once again made in the context of appropriate religious practice: petitionary prayers are frequently accompanied by offerings or sacrifices. This can lead to the impious suggestion that the gods are susceptible to bribery. In the example which Maximus chooses, Apollo decides to punish the Greeks for the abduction of Chryseis only after Chryses reminds him of the many offerings of thigh bones he has burnt in honour of the god in the past.[26]

This aversion towards petitionary prayer was widespread in antiquity and caused some embarrassment for the Christians in relation to the request for daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. Origen suggests that it is really a request for spiritual nourishment at *On Prayer* 27,[27] whereas, while Gregory of Nyssa accepted a literal interpretation, he limited it to necessities (rather than luxuries) or that which we deserve as a result of our labours.[28] Similarly, Celsus criticises Jesus'

ἐκ τοῦ βελτίστου, πονηρῶς μετέθετο· τὸ δὲ θεῖον ἔξω πονηρίας. καὶ γὰρ ἤτοι ὁ εὐχόμενος ἄξιος τυχεῖν ὢν ηὔξατο ἢ οὐκ ἄξιος· εἰ μὲν οὖν ἄξιος, τεύξεται καὶ μὴ εὐξάμενος· εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἄξιος, οὐ τεύξεται οὐδὲ εὐξάμενος. οὔτε γὰρ ὁ ἄξιος μὲν, παραλείπων δὲ τὴν εὐχήν, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἄξιος, ὅτι οὐκ εὔξατο· οὔτε ὁ μὴ ἄξιος μὲν τυχεῖν, λαβεῖν δὲ εὐχόμενος, διὰ τοῦτο ἄξιος, ὅτι εὔξατο·

20 ἐὰν δὲ εἰς τὰς πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς παρέλθῃς εὐχάς, εἰς δικαστήριον παρελήλυθας ἀκριβὲς καὶ ἀπαραίτητον·

21 Plato, *Rep.* II 364d, criticising Homer, *Iliad* IX, 497.

22 *Or.* 11.12.

23 *Or.* 5.2.

24 Plotinus, *Enn.* III 2 [47] 8.36–40.

25 *Or.* 23.3.

26 *Il.* I 35–42; *Or.* 5.2.

27 The argument was already suggested by John 6:27.

28 Gregory of Nyssa, *Fourth Homily on the Lord's Prayer* 51/25 & 55/22 (GNO VII/1, 1992).

prayer at Gethsemane (Mk. 14, 35–36; Mt. 26, 37–38; Lk. 22, 41–45) which he interprets (polemically) as a petition made on the basis of fear.[29]

So is there any circumstance in which prayer is justified? Yes, the prayer of the philosopher, or rather the virtuous prayer. This is simply a discussion with the gods, rather than a petition, as exemplified by the entire life of Socrates or the works of Plato.[30] It must be made in a virtuous frame of mind "for how could anyone hear the voice of God when he is harassed by a mob of uncouth thoughts and desires? No more could a man hear the voice of law and authority in a noisy and tumultuous democracy".[31] That we might be granted an apprehension of God also depends upon God himself: "How then can a man swim to safety and see God? The true answer is that you will see him when he calls you to him."[32] This sort of prayer not only demonstrates the virtue of the one making it, rather it allows the philosopher to achieve even greater virtue. Maximus makes the point that if we accept that poetic talent comes from God, we must also accept that he bestows virtue too.[33] This sort of prayer can be illustrated by Socrates' conversation with his *daimonion* at *Symp*. 175a, or with Eros at *Phdr*. 257a–b to assist him in his philosophical quest. Similarly, Socrates' prayer to Pan (*Phdr*. 279b8–c3) exemplifies this type of virtuous prayer: "Dear Pan and you other gods who dwell in this place, grant that I may become beautiful within, and that such outward things as I have may be in agreement with the things within. May I count him rich who is wise, as for gold, may I have so much of it as no one but the reasonable man should be able to bear and carry".[34] Van der Horst suggests that this, along with Xenophon's observation at *Mem*. I 3, 2 that Socrates only prayed for good things may provide some Platonic justification for Maximus' claim that Socrates prayed for virtue and that he might live a life devoid of blame.[35] This differs from Origen's understanding of a God who receives the prayers

29 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2, 24–25.

30 *Or*. 5.8.

31 πῶς γὰρ ἄν τις συνείη θεοῦ ὑπὸ πλήθους ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λογισμῶν ἀλλοκότων ταραττόμενος; οὐ μᾶλλον <ἢ> ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ πολυφώνῳ καὶ συντεταραγμένῃ συνείη ἄν τις νόμου καὶ ἄρχοντος· *Or*. 11.10.28–31.

32 Πῶς ἂν οὖν τις ἐκνήξαιτ' ἂν καὶ ἴδοι τὸν θεόν; τὸ μὲν ὅλον, ὄψει τότε, ἐπειδὰν πρὸς αὐτὸν καλῇ· *Or*. 11.11.1–2.

33 *Or*. 38.5.

34 Ὦ φίλε Πάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι ὅσοι τῇδε θεοί, δοίητέ μοι καλῷ γενέσθαι τἄνδοθεν· ἔξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναί μοι φίλια. πλούσιον δὲ νομίζοιμι τὸν σοφόν· τὸ δὲ χρυσοῦ πλῆθος εἴη μοι ὅσον μήτε φέρειν μήτε ἄγειν δύναιτο ἄλλος ἢ ὁ σώφρων.

35 Van der Horst, P. (1977), 377.

made with the simple faith of the common people, as well as those made with the rational piety of the more intelligent.[36]

This leads to a further objection against petitionary prayer. Sometimes we are presented with difficulties in life as an opportunity for us to attain virtue; in such cases it is difficult to imagine that simply praying to be rid of such problems would be either an appropriate or efficacious response: "Who would deny that Odysseus is good by divine dispensation when Zeus remembers him and Athena cares for him and Hermes guides him and Calypso loves him and Leucothea saves him?"[37] However, "God in his love" subjects Odysseus to a range of character-building experiences. Odysseus' sufferings are accounted for in Homer as the result of his own hubristic actions; this would not suit Maximus' (Platonic) position that God is only the source of good things. Maximus cannot accept that Poseidon punishes Odysseus out of love for the savage Polyphemus or that Helios could possibly be so miserly with regard to his oxen.[38] Zeus did not even save his own sons, Dionysus and Heracles, from painful events—Dionysus was ripped to shreds, Heracles had a life of perpetual toil—in order to ensure that they might attain virtue.[39] Indeed, he was powerless to save his son Sarpedon from death (at *Il.* XVI 433–434).[40] At a less extreme level, many things which we pray for we could easily achieve ourselves, so petitionary prayer would be pointless in these cases: the carpenter has no need to pray for a plough or the brave man for courage.[41] Just like Socrates, the goods they obtain result from their own efforts.

Prayer also involves petitioning specific gods and this runs the risk of an incorrect division of divinity. Maximus, in common with many intellectuals in this period, has strong monotheistic tendencies. All gods help all men, but men have assigned each a sphere of responsibility.[42] This is understandable—they

36 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7, 46, 6–9.

37 τίς οὖν οὐκ ἂν εἴποι τὸν Ὀδυσσέα ἀγαθὸν εἶναι θείᾳ μοίρᾳ, οὗ μέμνηται μὲν ὁ Ζεύς, κήδεται δὲ ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ, ἡγεῖται δὲ ὁ Ἑρμῆς, ἔραται δὲ Καλυψώ, σώζει δὲ ἡ Λευκοθέα; Or. 38.7.11–14.

38 *Or.* 38.7.

39 Ibid.

40 Caution is required here, though. At *Or.* 5.5, Maximus portrays Zeus as subordinate to Fate, which differs from his general view that Fate is embraced within an overarching divine Providence. Secondly, in the Homeric episode that Maximus employs, Zeus is free to overrule the dictates of Fate, but chaos would result since the other gods would then snatch their favourites out of battle. In the manner in which Zeus sacrifices the individual for the good of the whole, though, the episode provides a suitable illustration of Maximus' views on Providence. This aspect, though, is not found in Maximus.

41 *Or.* 5.6.

42 *Or.* 39.5.

see that the earth has been divided up amongst various peoples and assume the same with respect to the heavens, unaware that "the Good is one and undivided, bountiful and ample".[43] The gods share one character and do not know division or conflict. Humans divide divinity into different deities as a result of their ignorance, since they are unable to conceive of the Good.[44] They do the same thing in the case of the sea, dividing it up into the Aegean and the Ionian etc. even though it is, in fact, all one.

Is it the case that the virtuous prayer will only be uttered by the philosopher, as stated by Van der Horst,[45] or could it be uttered by anybody, but it is simply the case that the philosopher is more likely to utter it, as suggested by Graf?[46] Maximus does not tell us explicitly, but we can make some inferences. The principal examples of virtuous prayers that we find in Maximus are those uttered by Pythagoras, Plato, or more usually Socrates. (A distinction can be drawn between the prayers which Plato places in the mouth of Socrates in the dialogues, as a divine conversation, and prayers as a request for knowledge, such as that which Plato attributes to Timaeus at *Tim*. 27c. In such contexts, Plato's prayers might be seen more as a petition, rather than a conversation with the gods, but they are not interpreted in that manner by Maximus, and indeed modern interpreters of the dialogues would view them as 'programmatic').[47] This sort of prayer can only be effective if, like Socrates, one has already abandoned inappropriate thoughts and desires; only then is it possible to hear the voice of God.[48] The philosopher is not praying to receive anything, but simply discussing with the gods what he has already received.[49] That is to say, it is a prayer made within the context of correct moral and theological understanding. Maximus' virtuous prayer contains elements of the lower two levels of Iamblichus' much more formalised tripartite division of (acceptable forms of) prayer:[50] "conductive or introductory" (συναγωγός) prayer (= contact with or awareness of the divine), and "complexive" (συνδετικός) prayer (= prayer which calls forth gifts from the gods even before the request is made). The highest

43 τὸ δὲ ἀγαθὸν ἕν, ἀνέμητον, ἄφθονον, ἀνενδεές. *Or*. 29.7.19–20.

44 *Or*. 39.5. The notion of the Good at the head of a metaphysical hierarchy is obviously reminiscent of Plato.

45 Van der Horst, P. (1977), 337.

46 Graf, F. (2011), 210.

47 Cf. Dillon, J.M. (2002), 279 [reprinted in this volume, see *supra*, p. 7].

48 *Or*. 11.10–11.

49 *Or*. 5.8.

50 As outlined at *De Mysteriis* v (ch. 26:237–240); Proclus, *In Tim*. I 207, 23–209,1 Diehl. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Dillon, J.M. (1995).

form of prayer in Iamblichus, "ineffable union" (ἄρρητος ἕνωσις), does not have any counterpart in Maximus. Maximus' description of the philosopher's prayer (a conversation with the gods about the things which he already has, rather than a request for anything more) sounds rather like meditation. Meditation can also be found in Stoicism[51] or in Neoplatonism,[52] though this can have a different emphasis. For example, both Seneca *Epistle* 99 and Plotinus, *Enn*. V 8 [31] 9 use thought-exercises as a means of redirecting our behaviour. While Maximus' orations could conceivably be regarded as attempting to fulfil a similar function, the point of meditation in Iamblichus seems to have been to reach an ecstatic state;[53] this is not a desire that Maximus expresses.[54]

Philosophers are not the only examples of virtuous individuals in the *Orations*, though. Odysseus is clearly represented as virtuous; the same might also be said of Priam. Odysseus still makes a petitionary prayer at *Od*. V 444 (when he is drowning): Maximus does not refer to the prayer itself, but the favourable response of Leucothea is mentioned at *Or*. 38.7. This casts doubt on the ability of the virtuous non-philosopher to pray correctly.

While Odysseus receives divine aid, Priam does not (despite his years of pious service sacrificing sheep and goats). Priam is juxtaposed with Agamemnon who, by contrast, receives a favourable answer to his prayer (although the reference to his safe return home is rather undercut by his subsequent murder upon arrival, though this is suppressed by Maximus.) Similarly, Zeus answers the prayers of the Greeks in ensuring that the lot of Ajax is picked for the individual combat. Maximus' point here seems to be that when we attribute a favourable outcome to events as a positive response to our prayers, we view the gods as unacceptably partisan. In any case, Maximus does seem critical of Homer's representation of Zeus as caring for the welfare of the Greeks and abandoning Priam despite his piety. Consequently, although it is not just philosophers who are virtuous in Maximus' orations, only they are depicted as engaging in the virtuous prayer (i.e. non-petitionary), because they do not have a flawed understanding of the divine which subsequently corrupts their religious behaviour. (Since Priam's religious practice consisted of attempts to bribe Zeus, his 'piety' can be regarded as dubious, in Maximus' terms). The description of the virtuous prayer of the philosopher at *Or*. 11.8 could be read as reinforcing the notion that the philosopher will not engage in petitionary prayer (since he is content with what he has, he has no need to ask God for

51 See, for example, Seneca, *Epistle* 99.

52 For example at Plotinus, *Enn*. V 8 [31] 9.

53 Dillon, J.M. (2002), 290 [reprinted in this volume, see *supra*, p. 19].

54 On Stoic and Neoplatonic meditation, see Rappe, S. (2000), 49–50 and 79–81.

anything material). This allows to philosopher to serve as God's messenger (*Or*. 11.9) and representative (*Or*. 11.6).

The Wider Religious Context

Maximus' main objections to petitionary prayer are that it is a form of inappropriate religious worship and engaging in this practice can lead to false conceptions of the gods which, in turn, can lead to a skewed form of morality. Returning to our original example of flawed petitionary prayer, the request of Midas, we find that here only part of Maximus' criticism is directed at the inappropriate nature of the petition;[55] it is also due to the unacceptable theological conception that accompanied Midas' prayer. He prayed not to a god but to Silenus, an individual of whom, given his half-human, half-animal depiction, Maximus would not be likely to approve; this, in fact, is indicated in his disdain that Silenus granted such a foolish request.[56] This false theological conception is recognised by Midas in the palinode to his later prayers, since he prayed "no longer to Silenus, but to the gods and goddesses instead."[57] God will not tolerate inappropriate prayers.[58]

Other forms of religious worship which Maximus views critically are the inappropriate use of sacrifices and offerings (which he also connects with prayer), and the debasing religious iconography of the Persians and the Egyptians: "They [the Egyptians] honour an ox and a bird and the nurselings of the river Nile, creatures with mortal bodies and miserable lives, mean to look at, debasing to serve and shameful to honour" (*Or*. 2.5). However, this is not the result of Hellenocentric chauvinism: the western Libyans are not criticised for regarding Mount Attus as a divine image;[59] this is compared with the reverence paid by the Paeonians to the sun, the Arabians to the *baitylos* or the Phrygians to the Marsyas and Maeander rivers.[60] None of these practices are criticised.

A closer look at the context reveals why Maximus is opposed to certain types of religious iconography. The Indians worship Dionysus in the form of a snake, but Maximus is not opposed to the use of the serpent as a religious image, but

55 *Or*. 5.7. In the same passage, Maximus makes it clear that success in unjust endeavours (such as Meletus' prosecution of Socrates is not the result of prayer).

56 *Or*. 5.1.

57 *Or*. 5.1.10–11.

58 *Or*. 5.7.

59 *Or*. 2.7.

60 Ibid.

rather that the Indians feel obliged to sacrifice sheep or oxen to it, which it devours "more like a tyrant than a god".[61] The problem with the Persian worship of fire is that the Persians feel obligated to feed it incessantly. Although some element of Hellenocentrism creeps in at this point in Maximus' criticism that the Persians were compelled to burn Eretria, Athens and Ionia as a sacrifice to their divinity, fire, the main target of the critique is the manner in which the Persians' impious religious behaviour has negatively impacted upon their morality: like the god whom they serve, they have become insatiable. The Egyptians believe that their gods die and mourn for them;[62] here Maximus' difficulty with the religious practice is that it leads (in his view) to an unacceptable conception of divinity. This follows the representation in Plato's *Euthyphro* of two different concepts of religion: one which is based upon fear (exemplified by Euthyphro himself) and that which is based on reverence (exemplified by Socrates). Plato criticises Euthyphro because of his fixation on ritualistic elements. (His pending court case is motivated by the desire to free himself and his father from the possibility of religious pollution) and his interest in religion is one motivated by his desire to preserve his material possessions (14b). He even views it as a business (ἐμπορική),[63] which implies that the goal of his religion is to obtain a profit in terms of what he has received from the gods, as opposed to the gifts which he offers them in an attempt to 'bribe' them into making a favourable decision. Maximus' criticism of the false understanding of prayer fits within this Platonic conception of piety: the use of religious practices in order to attain material gain and a superstitious reliance upon rituals motivated by fear of the god. Superstition is also dangerous in that it can direct us towards undoubtedly impious religious practices: a good example is the case of Psaphon who teaches the birds to sing "Psaphon is a great god". The superstition of the Libyans leads them to believe that this is a message from heaven, and so they turn to his worship.[64] Maximus expresses the same attitude toward oracles: it is possible for oracles or prophecies to bestow good advice, but any intelligent person would dispense similar advice. (The example which Maximus uses is the consultation of the Delphic Oracle at *Or*. 13.1). Again this attitude is not original or unique to Maximus; Trapp suggests that it goes back to Carneades (based on the evidence of Cicero *De Div*. 2.3.9).[65]

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61 καθάπερ τυράννῳ μᾶλλον ἢ θεῷ. *Or*. 2.6.15.

62 *Or*. 2.5.

63 *Euthyphr*. 14b and 14e.

64 *Or*. 29.4. In Aelian's version, the fraud is unsuccessful (*VH* 14:30).

65 Trapp, M.B. 117, n. 3.

Once religious practice is only directed towards obtaining and preserving virtue, Maximus has no difficulty with it. His cross-cultural account at *Oration* 2.4–2.8 of the various symbols uses to represent divinity is accepted, even in the case of the Persians and Egyptians, as an aspect of universal religious practice: "But if this latter is in fact the shared custom of all mankind, then let us leave established practice undisturbed, accepting the stories of the gods and preserving their symbols as carefully as we do their names".[66] Later on in the same oration, Maximus stresses his anti-sectarian stance and reiterates his basic view that diverse religious practices are unproblematic, provided that they are made within the context of an appropriate theological understanding of God; that is to say one that does not corrupt our morality: "What point is there in my continuing to enquire into the topic of images and to lay down the law about it? Let men know the race of the gods, let them only know it! If it is the art of Phidias that arouses recollections of God for the Greeks, while for the Egyptians it is the worship of animals, and a river or fire for others, I have no objection to such diversity. Let them only know God, love him and recollect him!".[67] This is in line with Maximus' view that philosophy is important as an encouragement to virtue, but it can lead to excessive theological speculation and 'sectarianism', which itself is a further example of an incorrect religious understanding which serves to harm our morality. Maximus compares a philosopher who develops too many arguments to a farmer who has acquired too many implements and starts to obtain diminishing returns from his land: this excess results in both becoming less efficient in attaining their goals. In this regard, philosophy differs from other branches of scientific inquiry which continually develop to become more accurate.[68] Maximus' tolerance does not extend to the irreligious Epicurus for obvious reasons, but even in this case Maximus avoids mounting an aggressive attack: in the context of asserting the value of Homer and Plato for approaching correct theological conceptions, he simply states that he pities Epicurus.[69]

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66 εἰ δέ ἐστιν οὗτος κοινὸς {ὁ} πάντων νόμος, τὰ κείμενα ἐῶμεν, τὰς φήμας τῶν θεῶν ἀποδεχόμενοι καὶ φυλάττοντες αὐτῶν τὰ σύμβολα ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα. *Or*. 2.9.20–22.

67 τί μοι τὸ λοιπὸν ἐξετάζειν καὶ νομοθετεῖν ὑπὲρ ἀγαλμάτων; θεῖον ἴστωσαν γένος, ἴστω<σαν> μόνον. εἰ δὲ Ἕλληνας μὲν ἐπεγείρει πρὸς τὴν μνήμην τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ Φειδίου τέχνη, Αἰγυπτίους δὲ ἡ πρὸς τὰ ζῷα τιμή, καὶ ποταμὸς ἄλλους καὶ πῦρ ἄλλους, οὐ νεμεσῶ τῆς διαφωνίας· ἴστωσαν μόνον, ἐράτωσαν μόνον, μνημονευέτωσαν. *Or*. 2.10.14–20.

68 *Or*. 33.1.

69 *Or*. 41.2.

Maximus' Arguments as Moralising Commonplaces

Maximus' criticism of prayer as conflicting with Providence conforms to the widespread view within Middle Platonism (although several Middle Platonic texts would also argue for some sort of lower Providence regulating human affairs—Maximus accepts this too, but still doubts the efficacy of petitionary prayer when greater (i.e. more universal) interests are at stake).[70]

Maximus' attitudes are similar to those of his near-contemporary, Lucian of Samosata.[71] There is naturally a difference of emphasis and expression, since Lucian is a satirist, but consider Lucian's criticism of the emptiness of rituals which accompany (or more correctly result from) incorrect theological perspectives: "When I see what empty-headed people do in festivals and other encounters with the gods, what they ask and pray for, and what they are thinking about the gods, then I am not certain whether anyone is so sad and full of sorrow that he would not laugh out loud at the silliness of what they are doing" (*De Sacr*. 1.1–6).[72] Like Maximus, Lucian criticises the notion that the gods are susceptible to bribery.[73] He also points out the ignorance (or indeed malice) with which the majority of prayers are made at *Icaromenippus* 25–26, where prayers are depicted as flying up to Zeus' throne via a series of well-like orifices. Zeus in Lucian's text assesses prayers; this might be viewed as conflicting with the impersonal Providence of Maximus, but in *Oration* 5, Maximus also makes use of the motif of Zeus evaluating the worth of petitionary prayers (even though ultimately it has no bearing on whether they are granted or not): "God says 'Do you ask for some good purpose? Take what you ask for; if that is your condition you have no need to pray, for you will receive even if you are silent'" (*Or*. 5.7).

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70 Such views, of course, are also found elsewhere: Burns (2014), 183 cites the example of Cicero's Stoic spokesman Balbus at *ND* 2.164 "nor is the care and providence of the immortal gods bestowed upon the human race in its entirety, but it is also accustomed to be extended to individuals. We may narrow down the entirety of the human race and bring it gradually down to smaller and smaller groups and finally to single individuals" (trans. H. Rackham, slightly modified).

71 For a full discussion of the parallels see Graf, F. (2011).

72 Trans. A.M. Harmon. Ἃ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ταῖς θυσίαις οἱ μάταιοι πράττουσι καὶ ταῖς ἑορταῖς καὶ προσόδοις τῶν θεῶν καὶ ἃ αἰτοῦσι καὶ ἃ εὔχονται καὶ ἃ γιγνώσκουσι περὶ αὐτῶν, οὐκ οἶδα εἴ τις οὕτως κατηφής ἐστι καὶ λελυπημένος ὅστις οὐ γελάσεται τὴν ἀβελτερίαν ἐπιβλέψας τῶν δρωμένων.

73 *De Sacr*. 2.

Conclusion

One might close by citing Dillon's comment on Maximus, that "he is primarily concerned with the artistic embellishment of platitudes".[74] His orations provide an entertaining insight into the role which prayer held amongst an educated second century public, but it is one which does not contain any innovations or striking developments. Maximus' attitudes are typical of the concerns frequently expressed during antiquity. This is what we would expect of a populariser of philosophy, rather than a serious philosopher in his own right. In his view that prayer must take place within the context of a correct theological conception, we can see the development from the virtuous prayers which Plato places in the mouth of Socrates towards Plotinus' conception of prayer as a striving for higher ontological levels on the part of the soul: "first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone".[75] Prayer is just one aspect of correct religious behaviour and Maximus, despite his generally open and tolerant stance, is opposed to any practice, whether this is inappropriate religious iconography, the use of sacrifice as an attempt to bribe the gods, or reliance upon sacrifice, which could lead to incorrect theological conceptions. These are not views of the divine which might be perceived as inappropriate from a sectarian perspective[76]—Maximus frequently indicates that such concerns are far from his mind—but rather conceptions of God which will lead us away from true (i.e. rational) piety, towards a form of religion which is based upon superstition or even worse, upon fear. The ultimate consequences will be a skewed morality which will preclude the attainment of virtue and of the good life.

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74 Dillon, J.M. (1977), 399.

75 θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐπικαλεσαμένοις οὐ λόγῳ γεγωνῷ, ἀλλὰ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκτείνασιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον, εὔχεσθαι τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον δυναμένους μόνους πρὸς μόνον. Plotinus, *Enn*. V 1 [10] 6.9–11; trans. A.H. Armstrong.

76 Naturally, the irreligious Epicureans are excluded here.

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Awaiting the Sun: A Plotinian Form of Contemplative Prayer

*Michael Wakoff**

Forms of Prayer in Plotinus

Plotinus did not write extensively about the topic of prayer. His most elaborate discussion of one form of prayer, petitionary prayer, occurs in IV 4 [28] 40–44, and his aim there is to make clear the august, inviolable nature of the divinities of the heavenly bodies despite the fact that they respond to petitionary prayers. The difficulty is that these responses sometimes occur after some time has elapsed since the prayers were made. But, as he demonstrates, the gods have no memory of prayers because they unceasingly direct their attention toward the timeless intelligible world and the One that is its source and stay. How then can the gods respond to prayer? He resolves the issue by arguing that responses to prayer occur because of the unity of the cosmos, where all things are knit together through sympathy:

> But when a man prays to a heavenly body, some influence comes from it upon him or upon another person. But the sun, or another heavenly body, does not hear his prayers. And that which he prays for comes about because one part is in sympathetic connection with another, just as in one tense string; for if the string is plucked at the lower end, it has a vibration at the upper.[1]
>
> transl. ARMSTRONG

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1 Plotinus IV 4 [28] 40.32–41.4: Ὧι δ' ηὔξατο, ἦλθέ τι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξ ἐκείνου ἢ πρὸς ἄλλον. Ὁ δὲ ἥλιος ἢ ἄλλο ἄστρον οὐκ ἐπαίει. Καὶ γίνεται τὸ κατὰ τὴν εὐχὴν συμπαθοῦς μέρους μέρει γενομένου, ὥσπερ ἐν μιᾷ νευρᾷ τεταμένῃ. κινηθεῖσα γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ κάτω καὶ ἄνω ἔχει τὴν κίνησιν.

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Human beings can make use of this sympathetic connection for their own purposes, much as we nowadays can harness light to power our homes, or falling water to generate electricity. Petitionary prayers are thus a form of sympathetic magic. Magicians and those who pray to the gods bring about effects in the cosmos by manipulating the bonds of cosmic sympathy. The gods do not direct their attention toward the prayers or the petitioners. The gods and those humans who have become established in contemplation cannot be manipulated or commanded because their attention is ever inward turned and self-directed: "Contemplation (*theoria*) alone remains incapable of enchantment because no one who is self-directed is subject to enchantment: for he is one and that which he contemplates is himself, and his reason is not deluded" (IV 4 [28] 44.1–3, transl. Armstrong).

This brief summary of Plotinus's discussion of petitionary prayer might suggest that the contemplative life has no room for prayer. But there are a few places in the *Enneads* where Plotinus seems to have in mind by "prayer" something quite different than petitionary prayer. Rather than requesting that events in the outer world be made to conform to his or her desires, the philosopher prays to become aware of the truth that is already present unnoticed.[2] For example, at the end of V 1 [10], the great tractate on the three principal hypostases, Plotinus asks, "Why then, when we have such great possessions, do we not consciously grasp them, but are mostly inactive in these ways, and some of us are never active at all?" To remedy this lack of awareness, he advises us to "turn our power of apprehension inwards and make it attend to what is there" (transl. Armstrong). He compares it to listening intently for a desired voice, ignoring all other sounds, so one will catch it when it comes: "We must let perceptible sounds go (except in so far as we must listen to them) and keep the soul's power of apprehension pure and ready to hear the voices from on high" (V 1 [10] 12.14–21, transl. Armstrong). I think this turning of the attention inwards, this devout "listening" and patient waiting with undivided attention is an activity that blurs the lines between contemplation and prayer. Prayer in this higher sense is an aspiration to be present to the divine, an aspiration that moves the soul to awaken from its outer preoccupations so as to turn toward

2 The notion that spiritual truth is always present but that we are not always present to it is a common theme in the *Enneads*, for example: "For it [the One] does not lie somewhere leaving the other things empty of it, but is always present to anyone who is able to touch it, but is not present to the one who is unable … But if this is so, the soul must let go of all outward things and turn altogether to what is within" (VI 9 [9] 7). And: "The One, therefore, since it has no otherness is always present, and we are present to it when we have no otherness … And we are always around it but we don't always look to it" (VI 9 [9] 8).

and receive what is always present. In this sense, it is much more like meditation or contemplation; it is indeed a spiritual exercise.[3]

Probably the clearest example of this type of prayer in the *Enneads* occurs in V 1 [10] 6, where Plotinus, seeking insight into how from the One anything else came into existence, writes, "Let us speak of it in this way, first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone" (transl. Armstrong).[4] The activity is aspirational ("stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him"), wordless ("not in spoken words"), and involves an emptying of the soul, a purification from outward concerns, and a turning inwards ("alone to him alone").[5] I think these three features are essential to the activity we might call indifferently "contemplative prayer" or "prayerful contemplation."[6]

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3 John Dillon explores such a higher type of prayer in Dillon (2002), 285 [= *supra*, pp. 13–14]: "What activity of his [Plotinus] may correspond to what might vulgarly be termed 'prayer'? To answer that, we must take into consideration certain activities that would not be comprehended by the concept of 'prayer' at the 'vulgar' level, but which would certainly be included in the Neoplatonic concept, and specifically 'contemplation' (*theoria*) in all its forms. It is generally accepted that Plotinus indulged in various forms of meditation (though he himself is never very specific about this), by virtue of which he quite regularly united his intellect to the intelligible realm … It would seem that, in this connection, Plotinus made use of what have been identified as 'spiritual exercises'."

4 In his translation of the *Enneads*, A.H. Armstrong comments in a footnote to this passage: "[This is] the only explicit reference to genuine prayer in Plotinus (though his whole philosophy is prayer in this sense). Prayer to lesser deities for material needs is for him a magical activity." Elsewhere Armstrong remarks, "An important reason why there is so little about prayer in the *Enneads* of Plotinus is that so much of what he writes simply is prayer, understood according to the admirable catechism definition as 'a lifting up of the heart and mind to God'." See Armstrong (1991), 12. I thank John Dillon for calling my attention to this passage.

5 Plotinus uses variations of the phrase "alone to the alone" four times in the *Enneads*, always in the context of the soul's approaching the One by stripping off all that keeps it from being fully attentive to the One's presence, that is, the soul's purification. Probably the most famous occurrence is at the end of VI 9 [9] 11, where he describes "the life of gods and of godlike and blessed men" as "escape in solitude to the solitary" or more poetically rendered in MacKenna's translation as "the passing of solitary to solitary." The other two places are I 6 [1] 7.9 and VI 7 [38] 34.7–8. For discussion of the passage in V 1 [10] 6 and the formula "alone to the alone," see Atkinson (1983), 128–132.

6 The other striking example where Plotinus uses the term "prayer" occurs in the famous meditation described in V 8 [31] 9.15–16, where Plotinus suggests that the contemplator first visualize the entire visible universe as inside a luminous, transparent sphere and then remove the sense of there being spatial location and mass. Following this, the contemplator is to call

In the rest of this essay, I will examine the evidence that one of these spiritual exercises practiced by Plotinus, a form of contemplative prayer, involved contemplation of the sun.

There has been an increasing interest in, and revalidation of, the theurgy of the late antique Neoplatonic philosophers recently.[7] Some have extended this discussion by tracing the gnostic influences on Plotinus's praxis and suggesting ways in which his mystical experiences could be a form of theurgy.[8] These scholars have focused on the philosophical theory that underpins theurgy and Plotinus's spiritual exercises. But what were his spiritual practices really like? I think the contemplation of the visible sun was a Plotininan spiritual exercise and provides us with a clear example of how Plotinian contemplative prayer might have worked.

First, let me clarify what I mean by contemplation of the sun. Although there are many texts that attest the ancient Greek practice of making prayers and prostrating to the sun at dawn and sunset, this is not what I mean by contemplation of the sun.[9] This meditation involves sitting quietly, with breath even and mind's chatter allowed to lapse, and watching the dawning or fading light as the orb of the sun approaches the horizon. The beauty of the scene enchants and quietly steals over the meditator. If this experience is coupled with an understanding that the sun is the visible manifestation of spiritual reality as well as the aspirant's deepest self (as good Platonists and Neoplatonists would have understood), devotion and longing for union with deity and self will arise quite

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"on the god who made that of which you have the mental picture" and "*pray* him to come. And may he come, bringing his own universe with him, with all the gods with him, he who is one and all" (emphasis mine). John Dillon suggests that "the prayer envisaged here is really nothing other than the concentration on the image itself, and so a form of meditation, which itself provokes the presence of the god. No form of words is necessarily involved." See Dillon (2002), 286 [= *supra*, p. 15].

7 See Shaw (1999), (2012).

8 See Mazur (2003), (2004).

9 For a review of some of this evidence in relation to Socrates's attitude to the gods, see Notopoulos (1942). For example, the Athenian Stranger in *Laws* 887d–e mentions that "at the rising and setting of sun and moon, they have heard and seen saw the universal prostrations and devotions of mankind, Greeks and non-Greeks alike." See also Festugière (1953), 245 n. 3, who has gathered evidence for prayer to the rising sun in ancient Greek sources. And Plotinus refers to prayers to the sun in IV 4 [28] 30: "But now, since we established that memory in the heavenly bodies was unnecessary, but gave them perceptions …, and said they heard the prayers which we make to the sun, and other men to the stars …" (transl. Armstrong).

naturally. Thus, contemplation of the sun in this manner combines aesthetic perception, reverential feeling, visualization, and inwardization of attention.[10]

Now, I'm not aware of any place in the *Enneads* where Plotinus explicitly describes meditating on the sun in just this manner. Therefore, my argument will be indirect, a form of inference to the best explanation. The best explanation for Plotinus's use of imagery involving sun and light is that he had an intimate experience of them cultivated through contemplative practice. That is, we can understand certain passages in the *Enneads* better if we understand them to be derived from his mystical experience of the sun. Moreover, contextualizing Plotinus's mystical experiences in this way enables us to enter more deeply into the experience he wishes to evoke in his readers. For even if we have not meditated on the sun, we have all experienced the sense of well-being that arises in the presence of sunlight, the hope that comes with the rising sun, and the peace that comes with its setting.

Contemplating the Sunrise

The first text I want to look at is the end of V 5 [32] 7 and the start of V 5 [32] 8. Plotinus is explaining how the Intellect can have a vision of the One. Earlier in V 5 [32] 7, following Plato's discussion of the sun as the offspring of the Good in *Rep*. 508b, Plotinus suggested the following analogy: the sun is to the One as the illumined sensible objects are to the illumined intelligible objects, as the light by which sensible objects are seen is to the light by which intelligible objects are seen.[11] Although the medium (the light) is perceptible, we don't usually notice it because we focus on the visible form. The analogy with perception provides a clue as to how Intellect can apprehend the One: Intellect too sees by *another* light "the things illuminated by that first nature and sees the light in them … but if it abandons the things it sees and looks at the medium by which it sees them, it looks at light and the source of light" (transl. Armstrong).[12] Although

10 A meditation along these lines of South Asian origin is described in Brunton (1943), 230–231. I discuss Brunton's exercise and its connection to Plotinus's advice to "turn our power of apprehension inwards and make it attend to what is there" (V 1 [10] 12) in "Hushed by Beauty: A Neoplatonic Practice to Restore Ourselves to Soul" (paper presented at the Prometheus Trust conference "Philosophy: Restoring the Soul," Warminster, U.K., June 2013).

11 The analogy is also explained further in VI 7 [38] 16 and VI 7 [38] 21. See Schroeder (1992), 48 n. 29.

12 The sun meditation cultivates an appreciation for light. We notice the illumination of

this is not the main point of the passage, there is a lesson here: We should practice turning attention to the light rather than what the light illuminates. In contemplating the sun, we focus on the light rather than the things illuminated and so become more tuned in to light. Later, we'll see that this enactment on the sensible level is a preparation for, and perhaps even a completion of, the contemplation at a subtler level.

It is interesting that Intellect, usually described in terms that convey its eternal, completed, unchanging nature is here described as having a *sudden* experience of the One:

> Just so Intellect, veiling itself from other things and drawing itself inward, when it is not looking at anything will see a light, not a distinct light in something different from itself, but *suddenly* appearing, alone by itself in independent purity, so that Intellect is at a loss to know whence it has appeared.[13]
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> transl. ARMSTRONG; my emphasis

Plotinus's use of temporal language suggests that he is talking about an experience that human beings might have after they have ascended to Intellect. This is unfamiliar terrain even for accomplished contemplatives. The ordinary discursive mind has lapsed into stillness; the soul that has projected us into existence and keeps us alive breath by breath is free to sink into *its own depths*, and identity shifts to this soul, so we are present as the contemplator. If we are fortunate, we become aware of the shining archetype of the world, the luminous world of the divine Intellect.[14] Yet, somehow, there is still a longing in the soul for something deeper still, the source of All and its own Good. What can the soul do at this point? It must wait patiently in stillness:

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things, see the contrast between unillumined and illumined, and wait patiently yet expectantly for the light. When it's here, we reflect that the light now present is that light we waited patiently for in the dark. We see all things shining with light. Is there a further turn needed: to the unperceived perceiver who makes all thoughts known, all perception possible, like the perceiver of a dream, who needs no eyes?

13 Plotinus V 5 [32] 7.31–35: Οὕτω δὴ καὶ νοῦς αὑτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων καλύψας καὶ συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ εἴσω μηδὲν ὁρῶν θεάσεται οὐκ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ μόνον καθαρὸν ἐφ' αὑτοῦ ἐξαίφνης φανέν, ὥστε ἀπορεῖν ὅθεν ἐφάνη. Plotinus's description of the "sudden" appearance of the One may owe a literary debt to Plato's description of the sudden (*exaiphnēs*) vision of Beauty to the initiate of the mysteries of Love (*Symposium* 210e). I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

14 Plotinus describes this beautifully in V 8 [31] 4 as a world in which "light is transparent to light."

> So one must not chase after it, but *wait quietly* till it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it, as the eye *awaits* the rising of the sun; and the sun rising over the horizon (from "Ocean," the poets say) gives itself to the eyes to see. But from where will he of whom the sun is an image rise? What is the horizon which he will mount above when he appears?[15]
>
> transl. ARMSTRONG; my emphasis

This is perhaps the most explicit reference in the *Enneads* to the act of waiting and watching for the sun to rise. It's clear that Plotinus is giving advice to spiritual aspirants. He admonishes us to wait quietly for the One to appear, to *prepare* ourselves to contemplate it but not chase after it, just as the eye awaits the sun's rising from Ocean. This passage strongly suggests that Plotinus was familiar with waiting for the sun to rise in a special way, a way that requires some inner preparation. Plotinus says the eye *awaits* the sun, employing a form of the verb *perimenein* (to abide) used throughout the *Enneads* when Plotinus wants to emphasize the immobility and steadfastness of a productive principle in the act of producing, which is especially true of the One.[16] Moreover, this manner of abiding or waiting for the sun explains *how* one is to *wait quietly* for the One. *Wait quietly* translates the Greek verb *menein* (to abide or wait) and *hesuchei* (quietly or silently). Thus the preparation for contemplation is a silent waiting, a form of not doing. The soul must become formless or withdraw into that aspect of itself that is formless, by letting go, or emptying itself, of content.[17] This silent waiting can also be conceived as withdrawing attention from the objects illuminated to the light illuminating them, just as in awaiting the sun, we focus on the light that makes them visible.[18]

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15 Plotinus V 5 [32] 8.3–9: διὸ οὐ χρὴ διώκειν, ἀλλ' ἡσυχῇ μένειν, ἕως ἂν φανῇ, παρασκευάσαντα ἑαυτὸν θεατὴν εἶναι, ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμὸς ἀνατολὰς ἡλίου περιμένει· ὁ δὲ ὑπερφανεὶς τοῦ ὁρίζοντος—ἐξ ὠκεανοῦ φασιν οἱ ποιηταί—ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν θεάσασθαι τοῖς ὄμμασιν. Οὑτοσὶ δέ, ὃν μιμεῖται ὁ ἥλιος, ὑπερσχήσει πόθεν; Καὶ τί ὑπερβαλὼν φανήσεται;

16 In Schroeder (1992), chap. 3, "Silence," Schroeder shows the interconnections between the concepts of abiding (*menein*) and silence (*hesuchei*), the terms used in this passage. He beautifully shows how abiding quietly is the mode in which a higher reality produces its outfacing hypostasis, all such production imitating the way the All arises from the One while the One remains still and inward turned.

17 Cf. VI 7 [38] 34.2–7 and VI 9 [9] 11.40–50 where Plotinus tells us that the soul makes itself like the One by being alone with itself. There is an important connection between formlessness and stillness. This formlessness is also a placelessness, as Plotinus points out: the analogy breaks down for there is no horizon for the One to surmount.

18 "For the sun will then be all light which is in no form belonging to other visible things, and will be, perhaps purely visible" (V 5 [32] 7, transl. Armstrong).

Finally, Plotinus makes the striking statement that the sun is an image of the One. This is quite significant. For Plotinus, to be the image of something is to be intimately related to it. It is not that the sun is "our" symbol or image of the One. The divine sun is the *One's own image*, manifesting something of its power, goodness, and unity, thus making it a fit object for reverential contemplation.

A Disguised Sun Meditation

The text of V 1 [10] 2 may be where Plotinus comes closest to describing a meditation on the sun, with the sun now imagined as the soul of the universe. Plotinus begins by reminding us that soul made everything in the cosmos and is the source of all its life, including "the sun itself and this great heaven," and thus is more valuable than anything it creates or makes live. Switching his mode of discourse, he then provides what we might consider a *guided meditation* or *visualization*: we are invited to follow him by *imagining* something, and we should allow this imagination to *affect* us. The soul that is to engage in this exercise is one that "has become worthy to look by being freed from deceit, and the things that have bewitched other souls, and is *established in quietude*." What follows seems to be instructions for a meditator who wishes to "become worthy to look" at the great soul by becoming "established in quietude" (*hesuchoi tei katastasei*):

> Let not only its encompassing body and the body's raging sea be quiet [*hesuchon*], but all its environment: the earth quiet [*hesuchos*], and the sea and air quiet [*hesuchos*], and the heaven itself at peace.[19]
>
> transl. ARMSTRONG

The repetition of the word *hesuchos* three times is evocative. This stillness, peace, and silence is to be imagined as descending not only on the body and its raging seas of emotion, but on the entirety of the environment, extending from the earth to the heavens. Imagining this will establish the aspirant in stillness, outer and inner at rest. In Plotinus, such stillness, which is almost synonymous with being self-intent rather than outwardly focused, is the precondition for all

19 Plotinus V 1 [10] 2.14–17: Ἡσυχον δὲ αὐτῇ ἔστω μὴ μόνον τὸ περικείμενον σῶμα καὶ ὁ τοῦ σώματος κλύδων, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶν τὸ περιέχον· ἥσυχος μὲν γῆ, ἥσυχος δὲ θάλασσα καὶ ἀὴρ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐρανὸς ἀμείνων.

creative activity as well as the condition in which soul can receive revelation from its priors.[20] What is the meditator to imagine next?

> Into this heaven at rest let it imagine soul as if flowing in from outside, pouring in and entering it everywhere and illuminating it: as the rays of the sun light up a dark cloud, and make it shine and give it a golden look, so soul entering into the body of heaven gives it life and gives it immortality and wakes what lies inert.[21]
>
> transl. ARMSTRONG

We are to imagine soul pouring life and light into the cosmos in the same way as the sun illumines and tinges with gold a dark cloud. Plotinus asks us to visualize a cosmic sunrise, a contemplation at dawn, indeed, the *cosmic dawn* when the universe is born, the archetype of all our terrestrial dawns. First there is stillness and darkness, followed by light radiating upon it from everywhere, a light with no obvious place of origin.[22] In order to participate in this cosmic creation, we prepare by becoming quiet and imagining that our environment is quiet, mirroring the stillness in Nature at sunrise. Note the parallels with V 5 [32] 8, where the eye awaits the rising sun: In V 1 [10] 2, there is the recurring motif of quiet (*hesuchos*) and peace; we are to visualize, or imagine, the body, earth, sea, and heavens at rest, followed by the revelation of the soul's living presence, imaged as the sun's dawning and illumining the cosmos. In V 5 [32] 8, the motif of quiet (*hesuchei*) appears in the soul's abiding in silence, waiting quietly for the One to reveal itself, imaged as the sun's rising above the horizon. It seems inescapable that the visualization in V 1 [10] 2 is grounded in the experience of watching day break, as the rays of light fill the sky and illuminate all, with no

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20 E.R. Dodds (1960), 213, commenting on *Bacchae* 1084–1085, says that "stillness is the traditional response of nature to a divine epiphany." These lines "describe wonderfully the hush of nature at the moment when the pent-up forces of the supernatural break through: 'the high air went still, and the woody glade held its leaves in stillness, and you could not have heard the cry of any beast'." Cf. Schroeder (1992), chap. 3.

21 Plotinus V 1 [10] 2.17–23: Νοείτω δὲ πάντοθεν εἰς αὐτὸν ἑστῶτα ψυχὴν ἔξωθεν οἷον εἰσρέουσαν καὶ εἰσχυθεῖσαν καὶ πάντοθεν εἰσιοῦσαν καὶ εἰσλάμπουσαν· οἷον σκοτεινὸν νέφος ἡλίου βολαὶ φωτίσασαι λάμπειν ποιοῦσι χρυσοειδῆ ὄψιν διδοῦσαι, οὕτω τοι καὶ ψυχὴ ἐλθοῦσα εἰς σῶμα οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκε μὲν ζωήν, ἔδωκε δὲ ἀθανασίαν, ἤγειρε δὲ κείμενον.

22 Compare to VI 4 [22] 7 for Plotinus's example of a transparent spherical body enclosing a luminous bulk at its center as the source of light. We are next to imagine that someone takes away "the bulk of the body but kept the power of the light." The light would be omnipresent. He then argues that soul's omnipresence is like such an omnipresent light without a point of origin.

apparent source, especially the period just before the sun appears above the horizon, when the clouds are wonderfully tinged with golden light. Plotinus has taken the experience of watching the sunrise and reimagined it as the shining of the omnipresent soul enlivening the cosmos and all the living creatures within it. The sunrise has been transposed in contemplation to a cosmic scale.[23]

The Metaphor Objection: A Reply

There are other passages from the *Enneads* that take on new meaning when viewed as being grounded in contemplation of the visible sun, but due to time constraints, I can't discuss them here.[24] Instead, I want to address what is perhaps the most powerful objection to my interpretation of these passages as evidence of a practice of contemplating the rising sun: that Plotinus is just using the sun as an analogy or a metaphor.[25] The *Enneads* are filled with passages in which the image of the sun's illumination is used to convey spiritual truths. Are these passages all disguised forms of sun contemplation or do they merely use the sun as a metaphor?

However, given a Plotinian worldview, in which the sensible world is an image of the intelligible world, the result of the cosmic soul's contemplation of Intellect, the sensible world *itself* is the metaphor. So what's needed is to pay attention to the world and let it perform its function of being the contemplation of the soul. While perceiving the sensible, we transform our perception by imagining that the spiritual truth that we know *theoretically* to be the case *is actually the case*. We vividly imagine the spiritual truth by imagining the sensible world as the soul's contemplation. Since the sensible

23 See also I 1 [53] 7 on the light from the soul that shines into body to form the living creature.

24 For example, V 8 [31] 3, V 8 [31] 10–11, IV 3 [27] 11, VI 7 [38] 21, and VI 4 [22] 7. "But he appears from some invisible place and dawning on them from high illuminates everything and fills it with his rays" (V 8 [31] 10, transl. Armstrong). All of V 8 could be seen as the awaiting of the dawning of the sun. The place beyond the heavens is where the sun behind the sun "is." On the special nature of light, see V 8 [31] 3, "What makes the gods beautiful is Intellect intensely active in them so as to be visible" (transl. Armstrong). There is a significant parallel between "bringing the vision within" (V 8 [31] 10) and the practice in Tibetan Buddhist tantric sadhanas of imagining light raying forth from your heart, blessing all beings, and then imagining it returning and dissolving into you, and then you dissolving into emptiness.

25 The status of Plotinus's metaphors is a source of controversy. For discussion, see Beierwaltes (1961); Ferwerda (1965); Schroeder (1992), 3–4, chap. 2, especially 33 n.; and Rappe (2000), especially chap. 5.

world is the result of the soul's translation, or transposition, of its intelligible content, contemplation of it combined with this imaginative enacting of what is actually the case enables the contemplator to deepen his or her experience and feel the original stimulus that provoked the world into being. Think of a composer receiving an inspiration and using his or her art to translate this into a musical work. We then listen to the performance of it and something of the composer's inspiration is received. Soul is the consummate artist, continually inspired by the presence of the intelligible world and possessed of a real genius in translating this inspiration into the life of the cosmos. Plotinus, too, was a genius. By taking his images as themes for guided meditation, we can receive something of the intelligible content he was trying to convey.[26]

The Sun as the Visible Statue of the One

Let's apply these ideas to the sensible sun. There are many passages in the Enneads where Plotinus refers to the visible sun as a god.[27] And what makes it a god is that it has a divine soul, a divine intellect, and that it's ever in contemplation of the One.[28] For Plotinus, this was true of all the gods, even those that were in the cosmos in the sense that they presided over bodies that were part of the cosmos, for example the sun, the planets, and stars. But there is something special about the sun. Following Plato, he says that the sun is an image of the One, as in V 5 [32] 8: "But from where will he of whom the *sun is an image* rise?" (transl. Armstrong).[29]

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26 There are two points here. First, Plotinus guides us by identifying features of the sensible world that would be efficacious to contemplate. Because of the close connection of image to archetype, contemplating the sensible image will bring us closer to experiencing the archetype. Second, just as a musical genius selects the notes, key signature, harmonies, etc., to convey something of the inspiration he or she receives, so too Plotinus has chosen his images to convey spiritual truths.

27 For example, see V 1 [10] 2, III 5 [50] 6, IV 3 [27] 11.

28 Its contemplation of its own divine self in the One, its own divine Idea in the Nous, its own divine soul in the Absolute Soul is unbroken, unwavering. Divine soul, V 1 [10] 2.41; divine intellect, V 8 [31] 3.20–25; rooted in the One, VI 9 [9] 8.8–10. See V 8 [31] 3.28–29, "the gods who are in heaven, since they are free for contemplation, continually contemplate"; VI 9 [9] 11, 49, "this is the life of gods and of godlike and blessed men"; and IV 3 [27] 11, "these heavenly beings are gods by forever not departing from those intelligible gods and by being linked to the original soul by the soul which, so to speak, went away [to the visible world]" (transl. Armstrong).

29 Later, Proclus will observe that the sun is exalted in yet another way: it is a "supramun-

In IV 3 [27] 11, Plotinus notes that "the wise of old who made temples and statues (*agalmata*) in the wish that the gods be present to them" used the principle that the soul would be most attracted to something sympathetic to it and "that which is sympathetic to it is what imitates it in some way." But his deeper point is that soul creates the cosmos in the same way, by imitating the intelligible realities, and that the living creatures in the cosmos are thus linked by soul to their intelligible archetypes: "It linked it with that god in conformity with whom it came into being and to whom the soul looked and whom it had in its making." He then gives as an example, that soul forms the link between the visible sun and the sun in the divine realm of Intellect. Through soul, the visible sun has a share in the god, the intelligible sun, and can share in its contemplation.[30] Thus, the sun, a natural statue of divinity, has the divine sun present to it much more intimately than does a statue of a god sculpted by a human artist.[31] So it seems plausible that someone who understood this would worship the visible sun, knowing that a god was truly present to this visible statue of the god.[32]

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dane" deity (unlike the mundane gods of the planets) because the *Timaeus* says that the Demiurge himself lit the fire of the sun. Plotinus comments on this passage of the *Timaeus* in II 1 [40] 7.

30 Cf. IV 3 [27] 11 and V 8 [31] 3: "Those of them whose dwelling is in the heavens are ever in this meditation" (transl. Armstrong).

31 Cf. V 5 [32] 9 where Plotinus explains the sense in which the One is present to all things without being *in* anything. Also see 6.4–5 [22–23] on omnipresence.

32 On the sun as a god, see also III 5 [50] 6.20–25: "The gods in the universe of sense down to the moon, the visible ones, are secondary gods which come after and correspond to those higher intelligible gods and depend on them, like the radiance around every star." A.H. Armstrong cites this passage in his discussion of Plotinus' treatment of light, fire, and emanation, and the correspondence of the visible to the intelligible universe. See Armstrong (1940), 56. Armstrong is very clear that despite the passages in Plotinus that speak of the sun as a god, he is not suggesting Plotinus was a solar theologian or a sun worshipper (ibid., 57). I think that Plotinus could be viewed as a sun worshipper in the sense described above—he worshipped the sun as a theophany of the One. Cf. G. Shaw, "Taking the Shape of the Gods: A Theurgic Reading of Hermetic Rebirth" (paper presented at the colloquium "Herme<neu>tica: New Approaches to the Text and Interpretation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*," Princeton, May 18–19, 2012, www.princeton.edu/~hellenic/Hermeneutica/ShawPaper.pdf), where Shaw shows how in the theurgy of Iamblichus, the world was regarded as a theophany of the gods, a visible *agalma*.

Eros and Image

Plotinus was sensitive to the beauty of this world and was moved by it; he writes passionately about its power to stimulate longing for the divine. The beauty of this world stirred him because of its continuity and connection with beauty's source in the heavenly nature he found within himself: "For how could there be a musician who sees the melody in the intelligible world and will not be stirred when he hears the melody in sensible sounds?" (II 9 [33] 16.39–41). Further, "Will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense … he will not thereupon think, *seized with reverence*, 'What wonders, and from what source?' If he did not, he would neither have understood this world here nor seen that higher world" (II 9 [33] 16.50–55, transl. Armstrong).

"*Seized with reverence*." Clearly, this is the language of eros. Would not someone who understood that the sun was a natural statue (*agalma*) of the One be "seized with reverence" when contemplating it?[33] Would not the effulgent sun vividly remind him or her of the Good, for which all beings long, and call forth love.[34] Would not the sun carry something of the attractive power of the Good to recall all things to itself because of the intimate continuity of image with archetype?

> When anyone, therefore, sees this light, then truly he is moved to the Forms, and longs for the light which plays upon them and delights in it […] For each is what it is by itself; but it becomes desirable when the Good colours it, giving a kind of grace to them and passionate love to the desirers. Then the soul, receiving into itself an outflow from

33 My claim that Plotinus regards the sun as a natural statue (*agalma*) of the One is based on two pieces of evidence: (i) he refers to the sun as an image of the One in V 5 [32] 8.8 ("But from where will he of whom the sun is an image rise?" transl. Armstrong) and (ii) in IV 3 [27] 11 (as discussed in the previous section), he argues that the wise men of old made statues (*agalmata*) of the gods by creating things that would imitate them in some way, and that the All too creates sensible objects "in imitation of the [intelligible realities]" (transl. Armstrong), and he goes on to use the example of the visible sun as an imitation of the intelligible sun. The visible sun is thus a natural statue (as opposed to one made by a human artificer) in virtue of imitating the intelligible sun, and is an *agalma* of the One in virtue of being an image of the One.

34 Moreover, it would be not just a representation of the One but something of the One would be present to it, just as the light seen in a mirror is really light and not a copy of light. This point is made forcefully by Schroeder, *Form and Transformation*, chap. 2.

> thence, is moved and dances wildly and is all stung with longing and becomes love [*eros*].[35]

We can imagine Plotinus sitting quietly, awaiting the rising of the sun. He knows that the sun is the image of the One, the Good. Its light and beauty are the visible manifestation of the One, the object of his eros. He knows that the sun is linked to the divine archetype that the Soul contemplated in producing the sun and that by its means the intelligible sun is intimately present to the sun, and the sun is intimately present to the intelligible's sun's contemplation of the One. Therefore, the visible sun is both an expression of the One, its most apt visible expression, and a divinity ever engaged in contemplating the One.

How could Plotinus not be moved by the sight of the rising sun? How could he not be inspired to worship, contemplate, and commune with such a palpable presence of the object of his love? Waiting silently for the rising sun, he would be enacting the soul's act of silently awaiting the One, and given the ontological continuity of image with archetype, outer with inner, the blessed vision of the One might *suddenly* occur.

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35 Plotinus VI 7 [38] 22.1–10: Ὅταν οὖν τὸ φῶς τοῦτό τις ἴδῃ, τότε δὴ καὶ κινεῖται ἐπ' αὐτὰ καὶ τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ ἐπιθέοντος ἐπ' αὐτοῖς γλιχόμενος εὐφραίνεται [...] Ἔστι γὰρ ἕκαστον ὅ ἐστιν ἐφ' αὑτοῦ· ἐφετὸν δὲ γίνεται ἐπιχρώσαντος αὐτὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὥσπερ χάριτας δόντος αὐτοῖς καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐφιέμενα ἔρωτας. Καὶ τοίνυν ψυχὴ λαβοῦσα εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ἀπορροὴν κινεῖται καὶ ἀναβακχεύεται καὶ οἴστρων πίμπλαται καὶ ἔρως γίνεται. Cf. I 6 [1] and VI 7 [38] 31. In the rest of VI 7 [38] 22, the imagery parallels the cosmic sunrise of V 1 [10] 2. The soul is inactive, supine, unenlivened by the Intellect until the Good colors it and itself, then it awakens. The Good gives life and longing just as the soul gives life and quickens the cosmos.

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Porphyry on Prayer

Platonic Tradition and Religious Trends in the Third Century

Andrei Timotin

The criticism of prayer has a long tradition in Greek Antiquity. In a fragment of his lost Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* transmitted by Proclus, Porphyry divided up those who deny the usefulness of prayer into three classes: the atheists, who reject even the existence of gods; those who accept the existence of gods, but deny their involvement in the human matters; and those who also concede that the gods exist, but affirm that they are devoid of free will insofar as all their actions are necessary.

> Now the philosopher Porphyry, in distinguishing between those of the ancients who have accepted prayer (εὐχή) and those who have not, has given us a guided tour to the various opinions on the subject which can be summarized as follows. Those who have been afflicted with the primary form of atheism (ἀθεότητα), that is who deny that the gods exist at all, reject the assistance that prayer gives, and so do those who are afflicted with the secondary form of atheism, that is those who admit that the gods exist but wholly reject providence (πρόνοια), as well as those who concede that the gods exist and that they exercise providence but affirm that everything they cause occurs by necessity (ἐξ ἀνάγκης), for if there is nothing that can take place other than it does, the benefit of prayer is destroyed (ἀναιρεῖται τὸ τῆς εὐχῆς ὄφελος).[1]

This taxonomy is not original. Origen, who wrote a treatise *On prayer*, composed probably about the year 233 or 234,[2] is the author of a similar attempt

1 Porphyry, *In Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano, transl. H. Tarrant [= Proclus, *In Tim.* I, 207.23–208.3 Diehl]: ὁ μὲν γὰρ φιλόσοφος Πορφύριος διοριζόμενος, τίνες μὲν τῶν παλαιῶν προσήκαντο τὴν εὐχήν, τίνες δὲ οὔ, περιήγαγεν ἡμᾶς ἐπ' ἄλλας καὶ ἄλλας δόξας λέγων, ὡς συλλήβδην εἰπεῖν, ὡς οὔτε οἱ τὴν πρώτην ἀθεότητα νοσήσαντες προσποιοῦνται τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς εὐχῆς ὠφέλειαν, οἵ γε μηδὲ εἶναι λέγοντες θεούς, οὔτε οἱ τὴν δευτέραν, ὅσοι τὴν πρόνοιαν ἄρδην ἀνατρέπουσι θεοὺς εἶναι διδόντες, οὔθ' οἱ καὶ εἶναι καὶ προνοεῖν αὐτοὺς συγχωροῦντες, ἅπαντα δὲ ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίνεσθαι· τῶν γὰρ ἐνδεχομένων καὶ ἄλλως γίνεσθαι μὴ ὄντων ἀναιρεῖται τὸ τῆς εὐχῆς ὄφελος.

2 Cf. O'Meara (1954), p. 8.

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to classify the arguments of those who reject the usefulness of prayer.[3] He also distinguishes between two forms of atheism—a radical one, which denies the existence of gods, and a moderate one, which concedes the existence of God, but rejects His providential administration of the world—, and a third class which concedes providence, but rejects prayer as uselessness either on the basis of God's foreknowledge, or of His deterministic activity.

The distinction between foreknowledge and predetermination inside of the third class is missing in Porphyry's classification. Porphyry also does not provide a nominal identification of the three classes, while Origen identifies the second class, which accept God, but reject providence (and prayer) with a Gnostic sect eschewing baptism and eucharist, and quibbling "about the Scriptures as not even recommending the prayer of which we speak, but as teaching something else quite different from it."[4] Origen could have referred here to

3 Origen, *On prayer* 5, 1–3, pp. 308–309 Koetschau. On this passage and Origen's answer, see Gessel (1975), pp. 149–171; Löhr (1999); Perrone (2011), pp. 79–121.

4 Origen, *On prayer* 5, 1, p. 308.13–22 Koetschau: Εἰ χρὴ τοίνυν μετὰ ταῦτα, ὥσπερ ἐκελεύσατε, ἐκθέσθαι τὰ πιθανὰ πρῶτον τῶν οἰομένων μηδὲν ἀπὸ τῶν εὐχῶν ἀνύεσθαι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο φασκόντων περισσὸν εἶναι τὸ εὔχεσθαι, οὐκ ὀκνήσομεν κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι, κοινότερον νῦν καὶ ἁπλούστερον τοῦ τῆς εὐχῆς ὀνόματος ἡμῖν λεγομένου … οὕτω δὴ ὁ λόγος ἐστὶν ἄδοξος καὶ μὴ τυχὼν ἐπισήμων τῶν προϊσταμένων αὐτοῦ, ὥστε μηδὲ πάνυ εὑρίσκεσθαι, ὅστις ποτὲ τῶν πρόνοιαν παραδεξαμένων καὶ θεὸν ἐπιστησάντων τοῖς ὅλοις εὐχὴν μὴ προσίεται. ἔστι γὰρ τὸ δόγμα ἤτοι τῶν πάντῃ ἀθέων καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀρνουμένων ἢ τῶν μέχρις ὀνόματος τιθέντων θεὸν τὴν πρόνοιαν δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀποστερούντων. ἤδη μέντοι γε ἡ ἀντικειμένη ἐνέργεια, τὰ ἀσεβέστατα τῶν δογμάτων περιτιθέναι θέλουσα τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ περὶ τοῦ μὴ δεῖν εὔχεσθαι δεδύνηται πεῖσαί τινας· ἧς γνώμης προῖστανται οἱ τὰ αἰσθητὰ πάντῃ ἀναιροῦντες καὶ μήτε βαπτίσματι μήτε εὐχαριστίᾳ χρώμενοι, συκοφαντοῦντες τὰς γραφάς, ὡς καὶ τὸ εὔχεσθαι τοῦτο οὐ βουλομένας ἀλλ' ἕτερόν τι σημαινόμενον παρὰ τοῦτο διδασκούσας. "If next we must expound, as you have asked us, the argument—first, of those who think that prayer affects nothing and who therefore say that it is superfluous to pray, we shall do our best to carry out your wishes. In this connection we now use the term prayer in its most simple and ordinary meaning … This view is not generally well-received and has no eminent protagonists, so much so that no one whatever who believes at all in Providence and God's supremacy in the universe can be found to reject prayer. It is a theory held either by those who are complete atheists and deny the existence of God, or by those who allow the existence of God in name but deny His Providence. But indeed only the influence of the Adversary, seeking to associate the most impious teachings with the name of Christ and the doctrine of the Son of God, could persuade certain men that they ought not to pray. The protagonists of this view are they who do away with all sense perception and practice neither Baptism nor the Eucharist. They quibble about the Scriptures as not even recommending the prayer of which we speak, but as teaching something else quite different from it." (transl. J.J. O'Meara).

"followers of the heresy of Prodicus", mentioned by Clement of Alexandria,[5] a Gnostic sect whose doctrine was supposed to go back, according to Clement, to the Cyrenaic school. Clement uses here a standard heresiological strategy, even if the founder of the Cyrenaic school, Aristippus (ca. 400 BCE), seems, indeed, to have been one of the first philosophers to have rejected the usefulness of prayer.[6] The allusion to the Cyrenaic school in this context is, anyway, intended for discrediting a Gnostic doctrine which contested, among other things, the usefulness of the practice of prayer, assigned to an otherwise unknown Prodicus. Prodicus, like the Cyrenaics, is very probably also an heresiological reference used by Origen to discredit those who shared or could share a similar opinion. His treatise on prayer, probably composed as a reply to questions raised by his friend and patron, the deacon Ambrose, the work's dedicatee, was, in fact, very likely motivated by such troubling theological views shared by some of his contemporaries, probably without any necessary connection to a Gnostic sect.

We do not know who were exactly Porphyry's adversaries, but the fact that he broadly adopted Origen's classification suggests that the opponents of prayer were still strong enough to require such a serious treatment and that they probably extended beyond the Gnostic-Christian milieu aimed at by Clement's and Origen's criticism. Anyway, the philosophical criticism of traditional peti-

5 Clement, *Stromateis* VII 41, 1–6, p. 144 Le Boulluec: Ἐνταῦθα γενόμενος ὑπεμνήσθην τῶν περὶ τοῦ μὴ δεῖν εὔχεσθαι πρός τινων ἑτεροδόξων, τουτέστιν τῶν ἀμφὶ τὴν Προδίκου αἵρεσιν, παρεισαγομένων δογμάτων. ἵνα οὖν μηδὲ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ αὐτῶν τῇ ἀθέῳ σοφίᾳ ὡς ξένῃ ὀγκύλλωνται αἱρέσει, μαθέτωσαν προειλῆφθαι μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν Κυρηναϊκῶν λεγομένων φιλοσόφων "Having got to this point, I recollect the doctrines about there being no necessity to pray, introduced by certain of the heterodox, that is, the followers of the heresy of Prodicus. That they may not then be inflated with conceit about this godless wisdom of theirs, as if it were strange, let them learn that it was embraced before by the philosophers called Cyrenaics". According to Clement, these "followers of the heresy of Prodicus" called themselves "Gnostics" (ibid. III 4, 30) and used apocryphal books of Zoroaster (ibid. III 4, 29–32). Some confirmation of Clement's statement was provided by Eric Segelberg, who collected evidence of a negative attitude to prayer in second century Gnostic texts; see Segelberg (1977). See Le Boulluec (2003), for Origen's use of Clement in his *On prayer*.

6 Cf. Aristippus of Cyrene, fr. IV-A 132 Giannantoni: ὁ αὐτὸς [*scil.* Aristippus] καθόλου τὸ εὔχεσθαι τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀπαιτεῖν τι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔφη γελοῖον εἶναι· οὐ γὰρ τοὺς ἰατροὺς ὅταν ἄῤῥωστος, αἰτῇ τι βρωτὸν ἢ ποτόν, τότε διδόναι, ἀλλ' ὅταν αὐτοῖς δοκήσῃ συμφέρειν. 'According to Aristippus, broadly speaking, to pray for getting something good and to require it of God is ridiculous; it is not when the sick man asks for food or drink that the doctors give it to him, but when they think that it would be useful for him'. The passage was compared with Clement's text by Pépin (1976), 124–125, who was, however, inclined to think that Clement made a direct use of Aristippus.

tionary prayers precedes by far the Gnostic doctrines opposed by Christian heresiologues. Moreover, Origen's classification is based itself on a doxographical tradition about the existence of gods and providence which he has very likely adapted to fit his concern with the opponents of prayer.

This doxographical tradition goes back to Plato's *Laws* X, 885b,[7] where beside the first two classes of Origen (and Porphyry)—that is the atheists and those who reject the existence of providence—are mentioned those who think that the gods "might be turned from their course by sacrifices and prayers (θυσίαις τε καὶ εὐχαῖς)", petitionary prayers being perceived here as a form of impiety.

Cicero elaborated a classification closer to Origen's and Porphyry's one and specifically ascribed the atheist position to Diagoras of Melos and Theodore of Cyrene.[8] It is not impossible that Origen and Porphyry had the same figures in mind, this opinion being not very widespread in Antiquity.[9] The idea that gods do not take care of human matters could reasonably be ascribed both to Epicureans and to Aristotle,[10] but it is already present in the quoted passage from the xth book of the *Laws*. As for the third class, Cicero, like Porphyry, had probably in mind the Stoics when he identified it with the opinion according to which "all things were from the beginning formed and established by gods and are throughout infinity ruled and directed by them".[11]

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7 Plato, *Laws* X, 885b: Θεοὺς ἡγούμενος εἶναι κατὰ νόμους οὐδεὶς πώποτε οὔτε ἔργον ἀσεβὲς ἠργάσατο ἑκὼν οὔτε λόγον ἀφῆκεν ἄνομον, ἀλλὰ ἔν δή τι τῶν τριῶν πάσχων, ἢ τοῦτο, ὅπερ εἶπον, οὐχ ἡγούμενος, ἢ τὸ δεύτερον ὄντας οὐ φροντίζειν ἀνθρώπων, ἢ τρίτον εὐπαραμυθήτους εἶναι θυσίαις τε καὶ εὐχαῖς παραγομένους. "No one who believes, as the laws prescribe, in the existence of gods has ever yet done an impious deed voluntarily, or uttered a lawless word: he that acts so is in one or other of these three conditions of mind—either he does not believe in what I have said; or, secondly, he believes that the gods exist, but have no care for man; or, thirdly, he believes that they are easy to win over when bribed by offerings and prayers" (transl. R.G. Bury). The supposed venality of gods is also blamed in *Resp*. II 364b–365b.

8 Cicero, *De natura deorum* I 2: *Velut in hac quaestione plerique* (*quod maxime ueri simile est et quo omnes sese duce natura uenimus*) *deos esse dixerunt, dubitare se Protagoras, nullos esse omnino Diagoras Melius et Theodorus Cyrenaicus putauerunt*. "As regards the present subject, for example, most thinkers have affirmed that the gods exist, and this is the most probable view and the one to which we are all led by nature's guidance; but Protagoras declared himself uncertain, and Diagoras of Melos and Theodorus of Cyrene held that there are no gods at all." (transl. H. Rackham).

9 On atheism in Antiquity, see Drachmann (1922); Woodbury (1975).

10 Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* V 156–169; Epicurus, fr. 352 Usener; Aristotle, *Metaph*. XII 9, 1074b15–34. Apuleius, in *De deo Socratis* (V 130; VII 135–137), criticises this view from the same perspective.

11 Cicero, *De natura deorum* I, 2: *quod uero maxime rem causamque continet, utrum nihil*

Origen was probably the first who adapted this doxographical tradition to the topic of prayer, but the criticism of prayer, which motivated his theological treatise, had a long philosophical (especially Platonic) tradition behind it, to which Porphyry himself belongs. With some rare exceptions (Aristippus), this tradition combines the criticism of traditional petitionary prayer with the assertion of an intellectual, non-petitionary kind of prayer. Such association is already well illustrated in the *Second Alcibiades*, a pseudo-platonic dialogue entirely devoted to the topic of prayer,[12] but its most elaborated form before Porphyry is the oration *Whether one ought to pray* of Maximus of Tyre.[13] Maximus develops a classification of the general factors conditioning events or things which men pray to obtain, where he distinguishes four main causes: general and individual providence (πρόνοια), destiny or necessity (εἱμαρμένη), fortune (τύχη) and human craft (τέχνη).[14] In Maximus' opinion, the classical petitionary prayer has no utility in any of these four views. This idea is at odds with Porphyry's theory in his Commentary on *Timaeus*, according to which those who assert the usefulness of prayer admit the existence both of providence and of contingent things: "Those thinkers, however, who state that the gods exist and exercise providence and that many of the things that happen could occur otherwise, quite plausibly also accept the [efficacy of] prayers and agree that they set our life aright."[15] Unlike Porphyry, Maximus considers that the traditional prayer is useless in both cases, that is if we admit the existence

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agant, nihil moliantur, omni curatione et administratione rerum uacent, an contra ab iis et a principio omnia facta et constituta sint et ad infinitum tempus regantur atque moueantur, in primis magna dissensio est "but as to the question upon which the whole issue of the dispute principally turns, whether the gods are entirely idle and inactive, taking no part at all in the direction and government of the world, or whether on the contrary all things both were created and ordered by them in the beginning and controlled and kept in motion by them throughout eternity, here there is the greatest disagreement of all" (transl. H. Rackham); cf. ibid. III, 93.

12 Cf. Zeller (2002); Scrofani (2009); Neuhausen (2010).

13 Maximus of Tyre, *Or*. 5 Trapp. On Maximus' treatment of the topic, see the study of Carl O'Brien in this volume (see *supra*, pp. 58-72). I have myself analysed Maximus's theory of prayer in a paper presented at the conference *Maxime de Tyr entre rhétorique et philosophie au II^e siècle de notre ère*, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, 25–26 November 2013. The Proceedings of the Conference are in print at the Presses Universitaires de la Méditerrannée (series *Mondes anciens*). See Timotin (2016b).

14 Maximus of Tyre, *Or*. 5, 4–7.

15 Porphyry, *In Tim*. fr. 28 Sodano, transl. H. Tarrant [= Proclus, *In Tim*. I, p. 208.3–6 Diehl]: ὅσοι δὲ καὶ εἶναι καὶ προνοεῖν φασιν αὐτοὺς καὶ πολλὰ τῶν γιγνομένων ἐνδέχεσθαι καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν, οὗτοι καὶ τὰς εὐχὰς εἰκότως παραδέχονται καὶ τὸν βίον ἡμῶν ἀνορθοῦν ὁμολογοῦσι.

of providence (because precisely of the prescience of gods, an argument we found in Origen's treatise), or if you admit the existence of contingent things, depending on fortune or on ourselves.

At the same time, Maximus states, like Porphyry, the existence of a different kind of prayer, specific to philosophers (φιλόσοφος εὐχή), which consists of a "conversation or discussion (ὁμιλία καὶ διάλεκτος) with the gods" and which is simply "a demonstration of (philosopher's) virtue" (ἐπίδειξις τῆς ἀρετῆς).[16] For Porphyry too, "prayer is especially appropriate for the virtuous (σπουδαίοις), because it is a connection with the divine, because like loves being connected to like and the virtuous person is most like the gods."[17]

The criticism of prayer as a kind of commercial request and the quest for a more philosophical species of prayer have important precedents not only in Maximus and in the *Second Alcibiades*, but already in Plato's *Euthyphro* (14c–e).[18]

Unlike Maximus, Porphyry did not define this non-petitionary kind of prayer in his Commentary on *Timaeus*. However, this concern is not absent from other works,[19] such as especially his enigmatic *Letter to Anebo*, a polemical ζητήμα on religious matters addressed to a fictitious Egyptian character, to which Iamblichus, the real addressee of the treatise, composed an answer in his *Response of Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo*, better known as *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, the title later ascribed to it by Ficino.

A series of fragments of the section concerning the topic of prayer in this work is fortunately preserved in *De mysteriis* and in Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*. I shall start with Eusebius' fragment, because it is the only one which gives a continuous and coherent quotation for this section of the *Letter to Anebo*:

16 Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 5, 8 Trapp: ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ἡγεῖ τὴν τοῦ φιλοσόφου εὐχὴν αἴτησιν εἶναι τῶν οὐ παρόντων, ἐγὼ δὲ ὁμιλίαν καὶ διάλεκτον πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς περὶ τῶν παρόντων καὶ ἐπίδειξιν τῆς ἀρετῆς "But you believe the philosopher's prayer to be a request for what he does not have, whereas in my opinion it is a conversation or discussion with the gods about what he does have, and a demonstration of his virtue" (transl. M.B. Trapp).

17 Porphyry, *In Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano, transl. H. Tarrant [= Proclus, *In Tim.* I, p. 208.6–9 Diehl]: καὶ δὴ καὶ προστίθησιν, ὅτι τοῖς σπουδαίοις ἡ εὐχὴ μάλιστα προσήκει, διότι συναφὴ πρὸς τὸ θεῖόν ἐστι, τῷ δὲ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον συνάπτεσθαι φιλεῖ, τοῖς δὲ θεοῖς ὁ σπουδαῖος ὁμοιότατος.

18 See also Plato, *Laws* III 687c. On Plato's views on prayer, see Motte (1980); McPherran (1996), 144–160; Mayhew (2008).

19 On the topic of prayer in Porphyry, see Schmidt (1907), 46–48; Des Places (1960), 269–270; Esser (1967), 35–54; Dihle (1999), 32–33; Löhr (1999).

> After these statements he [= Porphyry] again expresses his doubts to the Egyptian [= Anebo], saying: "If some [among the gods] are passionless (ἀπαθεῖς) [...], quite useless will be those invocations of gods (κλήσεις) which profess to summon them to aid, and to appease their wrath, and to make expiation, and yet more useless the arts by which gods are said to be constrained. For the passionless nature (τὸ ἀπαθές) can neither be enticed, nor forced, nor compelled by necessity."[20]

Only a short fragment of this section is quoted *verbatim* by Iamblichus, who seems to have deliberately dislocated the passage quoted by Eusebius, because most key words of this section are quoted and critically discussed further in the same section of *De mysteriis*. I quote here only the passage concerning prayer:

> But "invocations," (κλήσεις) the objection goes, "are addressed to the gods as if they were subject to external influence [or passion] (ἐμπαθεῖς), so that it is not only daemons that are thus subject, but also the gods."[21]

As we can see, by dislocating this passage from Porphyry's argumentation, Iamblichus weakened it deliberately, disconnecting the topic of prayer from the other forms of ritual coercion and, more important, omitting the idea of the uselessness of prayer, central in Porphyry's text.[22]

Unfortunately, the second part of the section devoted to prayer in the *Letter to Anebo* is preserved only in Iamblichus' quotations, although this time in a way which gives us a relatively good idea of Porphyry's argument:

> So then, after declaring that "pure intellects are unbending and not mingled with the sensible realm," you raise the question "as to whether it is proper to pray to them." (εἰ δεῖ πρὸς αὐτοὺς εὔχεσθαι) [...] And if it seems to you "incredible that the incorporeal should hear a voice (πῶς φωνῆς

20 Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 13 Saffrey—Segonds [= Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* V, 10, 10, transl. Gifford]: Ταῦτα εἰπὼν πάλιν ἀπορεῖ πρὸς τὸν Αἰγύπτιον λέγων. Εἰ δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀπαθεῖς [...], μάταιοι αἱ θεῶν κλήσεις ἔσονται, προσκλήσεις αὐτῶν ἐπαγγελλόμεναι καὶ μήνιδος ἐξιλάσεις καὶ ἐκθύσεις, καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον αἱ λεγόμεναι ἀνάγκαι θεῶν. ἀκήλητον γὰρ καὶ ἀβίαστον καὶ ἀκατανάγκαστον τὸ ἀπαθές.

21 Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 15 Saffrey—Segonds [= Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* I 12, p. 30.23–31.2 Saffrey-Segonds (transl. Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell)]: Ἀλλ' αἱ κλήσεις, φησίν, ὡς πρὸς ἐμπαθεῖς τοὺς θεοὺς γίγνονται, ὥστε οὐχ οἱ δαίμονες μόνον εἰσὶν ἐμπαθεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ θεοί.

22 On Iamblichus' theory of prayer, see recently Timotin (2014).

> ἀκούει τὸ ἀσώματον), and that what we utter in prayer should have need of a further sense-organ, and specifically of ears." […][23]

Porphyry's argumentation seems clear enough. As the gods are pure intellects and, as such, passionless, unaffected by any external influence, they could not be swayed by prayers and, more generally, by any audible voice. The prayers could be appropriately addressed only to demons (in the Platonic sense), which have part in divine intellect but which also are subject to passions, and as such, affected by human voice.

Most of the elements of this argument represent a rather common view in Middle Platonism, although Porphyry is probably the first Platonist who introduces the topic of prayer—a topic mostly related to such topics as destiny and divine providence—in the frame of the Platonic interpretation of Greek religion. The distinction between gods or God and δαίμονες in terms both of decrease of intellection and of absence or presence of passion is well attested already in the pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis* (984d–985b); it was later developed by authors like Xenocrates, Plutarch, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre or Calcidius.[24] In fact, they formalised an idea already expressed in Plato's *Symposium* (202d–203a), the *locus classicus* of Platonic demonology. The scholastic distinction between God and δαίμονες had an important function in Middle Platonism, because it allowed a philosophical explanation of the Graeco-Roman religion, especially of Homeric mythology, mystery cults, oracular divination and civic sacrifices.[25] Porphyry used it in the same sense in the *Letter to Anebo* when he doubted that sacrifices are an appropriate religious practice inasmuch as the gods are pure intellects and are not subject to external influences.[26] In *De abstinentia*, Porphyry makes clear that the bloody sacrifices of the civic cult are offered to δαίμονες and not to gods, who could not receive a material offering.[27]

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23 Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 17–18 Saffrey—Segonds [= Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* I 15, 35.7–10 and p. 35.15–18 Saffrey—Segonds (transl. Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell)]: Ἔτι γὰρ μᾶλλον ἀκλίτους καὶ ἀμιγεῖς αἰσθητοῖς εἰπὼν εἶναι τοὺς καθαροὺς νόας ἀπορεῖς, εἰ δεῖ πρὸς αὐτοὺς εὔχεσθαι […] εἰ δέ σοι ἄπιστον εἶναι καταφαίνεται, πῶς φωνῆς ἀκούει τὸ ἀσώματον καὶ ὡς αἰσθήσεως προσδεήσεται καὶ δὴ ὤτων τὰ λεγόμενα ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς.

24 Xenocrates, fr. 227–228, 230 Isnardi Parente; Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 417 B–F; Apuleius, *De deo Socratis* XIII 147–148; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 9, 4 Trapp; Calcidius, *Commentary on Timaeus* 131, p. 368 Bakhouche.

25 Cf. Timotin (2012), pp. 163–241.

26 Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 20 Saffrey—Segonds [= Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* I 15, 36.27–28]: Ἀλλὰ τὰ προσαγόμενα, φησίν, ὡς πρὸς αἰσθητικοὺς καὶ ψυχικοὺς προσάγεται.

27 Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II 42, 3: οὗτοι οἱ χαίροντες 'λοιβῇ τε κνίσῃ τε', δι' ὧν αὐτῶν τὸ

Moreover, his psychological explanation of oracular divination in the *Letter to Anebo* has much in common with Lamprias' discourse in Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum*.[28]

Porphyry's explanation of Greek religion is generally indebted to the Middle Platonic tradition, but they differ significantly at least in one aspect. Porphyry, as all the other Neo-Platonists after him, does not accept the common Middle Platonic assimilation between δαίμονες and Olympian gods,[29] very likely because it had already been adopted by Christians for polemical purposes. The supposed demonic character, this time in the Neo-testamentary sense, of the pagan cults is, in fact, one of the most common Christian gibes against them in Porphyry's time.[30] Carrying on the Middle Platonic equivalence between Platonic δαίμονες and Olympian gods would have been a very dangerous choice at that time and it is no surprise that no other pagan philosophers perpetuate it after the third century.

One of the consequences of this polemical refusal was that Porphyry no longer accepted a demonic interpretation of the whole civic religion.[31] If some of its ordinary aspects are still ascribed to δαίμονες (which could be ἀγαθοί or κακοεργοί), Porphyry endeavors to firmly distinguish between the low aspects of the civic cult and the superior ones, which are entirely immaterial and spiritual. Such a distinction is made in *De abstinentia* in relation to a theory of sacrifice:

πνευματικὸν καὶ σωματικὸν πιαίνεται. ζῇ γὰρ τοῦτο ἀτμοῖς καὶ ἀναθυμιάσεσι ποικίλως διὰ τῶν ποικίλων, καὶ δυναμοῦται ταῖς ἐκ τῶν αἱμάτων καὶ σαρκῶν κνίσαις "It is they who rejoice in the 'drink-offerings and smoking meat' on which their pneumatic part grows fat, for it lives on vapours and exhalations, in a complex fashion and from complex sources, and it draws power from the smoke that rises from blood and flesh" (transl. G. Clark). Plato already expressed the idea that the gods do not need sacrifices; cf. Plato, *Rep.* II, 365c; *Laws* X, 885b, 906b–c.

28 Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 53 Saffrey—Segonds [= Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* III 24, p. 117.10–13 Saffrey—Segonds]: Εἰ γὰρ 'πάθος ψυχῆς αἴτιον αὐτῆς καθίσταται', τίς ἂν εὖ φρονῶν ἀστάτῳ πράγματι καὶ ἐμπλήκτῳ πρόγνωσιν ἀποδοίη τεταμένην καὶ σταθεράν; "For if 'the cause of it [*scil.* divination] be made a passion of the soul', who with good sense would accord to something so unstable and impulsive a designed and deliberate foreknowledge?" (transl. Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell). Cf. Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 431E–432E. On the complex relation between Porphyry and Plutarch, see Zambon (2002), pp. 47–128.

29 Cf., e.g., Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 416E–417F, 421B–E; *De Iside et Osiride* 360D–363C; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 8–9 Trapp.

30 Cf. *1 Cor* 10, 20; Clement, *Protreptikos* II 41, 3; III 42, 1–3; Ps-Clement, *Homelies* IX 13, 2; Justin, *Apology* II 5, 3–4; Tatianus, *Oratio ad Graecos* 29; Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 26.

31 For Porphyry's interpretation of the traditional cults, especially of civic sacrifices, see Camplani, Zambon (2002), pp. 62–74; Toulouse (2005); Timotin (2012), pp. 164–215.

an inferior level is ascribed to the demons κακοεργοί, which are responsible, for example, for bloody sacrifices; the medium level corresponds to the demons ἀγαθοί which are responsible for some moderate (vegetal) sacrifices[32] (and also for the oracular divination[33]); the upper level is reserved for the intellectual sacrifice (νοερὰ θυσία) of the philosopher.[34]

There are good reasons to think that a similar distinction between at least two levels of the religious act was, *mutatis mutandis*, considered by Porphyry as an appropriate solution for preserving the utility and efficacy of ritual prayer, too. In *De regressu animae*, theurgic prayers and sacrifices are viewed as a suitable tool to purify the souls of men who are unable to behave themselves

32 Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II 36, 5: οἶδε δὲ ὁ τῆς εὐσεβείας φροντίζων ὡς θεοῖς μὲν οὐ θύεται ἔμψυχον οὐδέν, δαίμοσι δὲ ἄλλοις ἤτοι ἀγαθοῖς ἢ καὶ φαύλοις "Someone concerned for piety knows that no animate creature is sacrificed to the gods, but to other *daimones*, either good or bad" (transl. G. Clark); II 58, 2: καὶ μὴν ὅτι τούτων οἱ μὲν κακοποιοί, οἱ δὲ ἀγαθοί, οἳ οὐκ ἐνοχλήσουσιν ἡμῖν ἀπαρχομένοις ἐκ μόνων ὧν ἐσθίομεν καὶ τρέφομεν ἢ τὸ σῶμα ἢ τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ τούτου μέμνηνται "They have also reminded us that some *daimones* are maleficent, but some are good, and will not trouble us if we make offerings to them only from what we eat and what we use to nourish either body or soul".

33 Ibid. II 41, 3: […] ἀλλὰ καὶ προσημαίνουσιν εἰς δύναμιν τοὺς ἐπηρτημένους ἀπὸ τῶν κακοεργῶν κινδύνους, καὶ δι' ὀνειράτων ἐμφαίνοντες καὶ διὰ ἐνθέου ψυχῆς ἄλλων τε πολλῶν "[…] but in every respect there is no way that the good *daimones* will neglect their own concerns: they forewarn, so far as they are able, of the dangers impending from the maleficent *daimones*, by revelations in dreams, or through an inspired soul, or in many other ways"; II 53, 1: εἰ δ' ἄρα καὶ ἐπείξειέ τι τῶν τῆς ἀνάγκης, εἰσίν οἱ τῷ οὕτω ζῶντι τῷ οἰκέτῃ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ δι' ὀνειράτων καὶ συμβόλων καὶ δι' ὅττης ἀγαθοὶ δαίμονες προτρέποντες καὶ μηνύοντες τὸ ἀποβησόμενον καὶ ὃ ἀναγκαῖον φυλάξασθαι "If some necessity presses hard, there are good *daimones* who run before a man who lives like this, the house-slave of the god, and will tell him through dreams and tokens and voices what will happen and what it is necessary to guard against".

34 Ibid. II 45, 4: ἀνδρὸς ἄρα θείου ἡ ἔσω καὶ ἡ ἐκτὸς ἁγνεία, ἀποσίτου μὲν παθῶν ψυχῆς σπουδάζοντος εἶναι, ἀποσίτου δὲ καὶ βρώσεων αἳ τὰ πάθη κινοῦσιν, σιτουμένου δὲ θεοσοφίαν καὶ ὁμοιουμένου ταῖς περὶ τοῦ θείου ὀρθαῖς διανοίαις καὶ ἱερωμένου τῇ νοερᾷ θυσίᾳ καὶ μετὰ λευκῆς ἐσθῆτος καὶ καθαρᾶς τῷ ὄντι τῆς ψυχικῆς ἀπαθείας καὶ τῆς κουφότητος τοῦ σώματος προσιόντος τῷ θεῷ, οὐκ ἐξ ἀλλοτρίων καὶ ὀθνείων χυμῶν καὶ παθῶν ψυχικῶν βεβαρημένου "Holiness, both internal and external, belongs to a godly man, who strives to fast from the passions of the soul just as he fasts from those foods which arouse passions, who feeds on wisdom about the gods and becomes like them by right thinking about the divine; a man sanctified by intellectual sacrifice, who approaches the god in white clothing and with a truly pure dispassion in the soul, with a body which is light and not weighed down with the alien juices of other creatures or with passions of the soul"; cf. ibid. II 49, 3; *Letter to Marcella* 19. On the idea of the 'intellectual sacrifice' in Late Antiquity, see Young (1972); Ferguson (1980); Sfameni Gasparro (1989); Stroumsa (2005), pp. 105–144.

according to the intellectual part of their soul insofar as these prayers and sacrifices could purify only the pneumatic soul.[35] That means that only the pneumatic part of the soul could be purified by theurgic prayer. For the rational soul, this inferior kind of prayer is useless; the only kind of purification appropriate for the philosopher is the "intellectual life".[36] Therefore, the suit-

35 Porphyry, *De regressu animae* 7, pp. 34*.28–35*.5 Bidez [= Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* X 27]: *Quid prodest quia negare non potuisti errare homines theurgica disciplina et quam plurimos fallere per caecam insipientemque sententiam atque esse certissimum errorem agendo et supplicando ad principes angelosque decurrere, et rursum, quasi ne operam perdidisse videaris ista discendo mittis homines ad theurgos, ut per eos anima spiritualis purgetur illorum, qui non secundum intellectualem animam uiuunt*? "What do you gain by contradicting yourself? You could not deny that men go wrong when they school themselves in theurgic practices, and that they delude as many as they can with their blind and silly dogma, and that it is most certainly a mistake to resort with sacrifices and prayers to principalities and angels; but on the other hand, as if to cover up your waste of effort spent to learn this nonsense, you direct men to the theurgists for the cleansing of the spiritual souls of those who lives are not guided by the intellectual soul." (transl. D.S. Wiesen) Cf. ibid. 2, p. 30*.8–16 [= Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* X 10]: *Ecce nunc alius Platonicus, quem doctiorem ferunt, Porphyrius, per nescio quam theurgicam disciplinam etiam ipsos deos obstrictos passionibus et perturbationibus dicit, quoniam sacris precibus adiurari tenerique potuerunt, ne praestarent animae purgationem, et ita terreri ab eo, qui imperabat malum, ut ab alio, qui poscebat bonum, per eandem artem theurgicam solui illo timore non possent et ad dandum beneficium liberari* "Now here is another Platonist, Porphyry, who is said to be more learned, declaring that through some theurgic practice or other even the gods themselves are held bound by passions and disturbing emotions, for it was possible, when they were adjured by holy prayers, for them to be restrained from providing purification for a soul. They were, he says, so intimidated by one who demanded evil of them that another man, who required good of them, using the same theurgic art, could not secure their release and obtain their freedom to grant the good thing asked for." Ibid. 2, pp. 27.5–29.1 [= Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* X, 9, 2].

36 Ibid. 6, p. 34*.23–27 [= Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* X, 27]: *Tu autem hoc didicisti non a Platone, sed a Chaldaeis magistris, ut in aetherias vel empyrias mundi sublimitates et firmamenta caelestia extolleres vitia humana, ut possent dii vestri theurgis pronuntiare divina; quibus divinis te tamen per intellectualem vitam facis altiorem, ut tibi uidelicet tamquam philosopho theurgicae artis purgationes nequaquam necessariae uideantur* "But you were not so schooled by Plato; it was from Chaldaean schoolmasters that you learned to elevate human failings to ethereal or empyrean heights in the universe and to celestial firmaments, in order that your kind of gods might deliver divine messages to theurgists. It is true that by virtue of your intellectual life you raise yourself above these divine messages. You, being a philosopher, we must assume, can see that for you no such rite of cleansing by theurgic art is necessary in the least!". Cf. Esser (1967), pp. 38–39, 51–53; Luck (1989), pp. 209–210; Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013), pp. 83–88.

able prayer and sacrifice for an impassible, completely purified soul would be silent prayer and the *sacrificium intellectus*, that is the contemplation of God:

> So we too shall sacrifice. But we shall make, as is fitting, different sacrifices to different powers. To the god who rules over all, as a wise man said [*scil.* Apollonius of Tyana, Περὶ θυσιῶν], we shall offer nothing perceived by the senses, either by burning or in words. For there is nothing material which is not at once impure to the immaterial. So not even *logos* expressed in speech is appropriate for him, nor yet the internal *logos* when it has been contaminated by the passion of the soul. But we shall worship him in pure silence (διὰ σιγῆς) and with pure thoughts about him.[37]

The logical consequence of this idea is that the philosopher, who is supposed to live according to the rule of the intellect, is the only person who knows how to pray to God appropriately and the only one able to do it. This consequence is clearly expressed in the *Letter to Marcella*:

> The wise man honours God even in his silence (σιγῶν τὸν θεὸν τιμᾷ), while the fool dishonours Him even while praying and offering sacrifice. Thus the wise man only is a priest; he only is beloved by God, and knows how to pray (μόνος εἰδὼς εὔξασθαι).[38]

If Porphyry thinks that silent, i.e. intellectual prayer alone can be addressed appropriately to God, theurgic prayers could also have a beneficial (*i.e.* purifying), albeit low-grade function. They are expressed in vocal language and are active at the level of the pneumatic soul, while silent prayer concerns the intellect alone. This psychological and anthropological classification of ritual seems to be, in fact, Porphyry's final solution to the problem raised in the *Letter to Anebo*.

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37 Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II 34, 1–2 (transl. G. Clark): θύσωμεν τοίνυν καὶ ἡμεῖς· ἀλλὰ θύσωμεν, ὡς προσήκει, διαφόρους τὰς θυσίας ὡς ἂν διαφόροις δυνάμεσι προσάγοντες· θεῷ μὲν τῷ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν, ὥς τις ἀνὴρ σοφὸς ἔφη, μηδὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶν μήτε θυμιῶντες μήτ' ἐπονομάζοντες· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἔνυλον, ὃ μὴ τῷ ἀύλῳ εὐθύς ἐστιν ἀκάθαρτον. διὸ οὐδὲ λόγος τούτῳ ὁ κατὰ φωνὴν οἰκεῖος, οὐδ' ὁ ἔνδον, ὅταν πάθει ψυχῆς ᾖ μεμολυσμένος, διὰ δὲ σιγῆς καθαρᾶς καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ καθαρῶν ἐννοιῶν θρησκεύομεν αὐτόν. See on this passage Esser (1967), pp. 42–43.

38 Porphyry, *Letter to Marcella* 16 (transl. A. Zimmern): σοφὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ καὶ σιγῶν τὸν θεὸν τιμᾷ. ἄνθρωπος δὲ ἀμαθὴς καὶ εὐχόμενος καὶ θύων μιαίνει τὸ θεῖον. Μόνος οὖν ἱερεὺς ὁ σοφός, μόνος θεοφιλής, μόνος εἰδὼς εὔξασθαι.

However, the idea of a silent prayer associated to the intellectual contemplation of God was already shaped in the Middle Platonic tradition and was also familiar to Porphyry's master, Plotinus. This idea goes back at least to Philo of Alexandria;[39] one example is to be found in his treatise *On the Giants*:

> Mark you that not even the high-priest Reason, though he has the power to dwell in unbroken leisure amid the sacred doctrines, has received free licence to resort to them at every season, but barely once a year (*Lev*. XVI 2 and 34). For when we have reason (or thought) in the form of utterance we have no constancy, because it is twofold. But when without speech (ἄνευ φωνῆς) and within the soul alone we contemplate (θεωρεῖν) the Existent, there is perfect stability, because such contemplation is based on the Indivisible Unity.[40]

The text refers to the inner sanctuary (Holy of Holies) of the Temple of Jerusalem where the high priest alone enters once a year on Yom Kippur (*Lev.* 16, 34), and it was certainly influenced by the importance of silence in the rituals accomplished in the Temple.[41] However, silent prayer was not common in Hellenistic Judaism, and even less in the Greco-Roman religion. The Roman legal prayer, even private, is said out loud.[42] Silent prayer was generally suspect, if not even illicit; *tacitae praeces* frequently belong to magic.[43] The silent pagan

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39 On prayer in Philo, see the study of Menahem Luz in this volume (see *supra*, pp. 46–57).

40 Philo, *De gigantibus* 52 (transl. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker): ὁρᾷς ὅτι οὐδὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς λόγος ἐνδιατρίβειν ἀεὶ καὶ ἐνσχολάζειν τοῖς ἁγίοις δόγμασι δυνάμενος ἄδειαν ἔσχηκεν ἀνὰ πάντα καιρὸν πρὸς αὐτὰ φοιτᾶν, ἀλλ' ἅπαξ δι' ἐνιαυτοῦ μόλις; τὸ μὲν γὰρ μετὰ λόγου τοῦ κατὰ προφορὰν οὐ βέβαιον, ὅτι δυάς, τὸ δ' ἄνευ φωνῆς μόνῃ ψυχῇ τὸ ὂν θεωρεῖν ἐχυρώτατον, ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἀδιαίρετον ἵσταται μονάδα. Cf. *De plantatione* 126: θεῷ δὲ οὐκ ἔνεστι γνησίως εὐχαριστῆσαι δι' ὧν νομίζουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ κατασκευῶν ἀναθημάτων θυσιῶν—οὐδὲ γὰρ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος ἱερὸν ἀξιόχρεων ἂν γένοιτο πρὸς τὴν τούτου τιμήν—, ἀλλὰ δι' ἐπαίνων καὶ ὕμνων, οὐχ οὓς ἡ γεγωνὸς ἄσεται φωνή, ἀλλὰ οὓς ὁ ἀειδὴς καὶ καθαρώτατος νοῦς ἐπηχήσει καὶ ἀναμέλψει. "But it is not possible genuinely to express our gratitude to God by means of buildings and oblations and sacrifices, as is the custom of most people, for even the world were not a temple adequate to yield the honour due to Him. Nay, it must be expressed by means of hymns of praise, and these not such as the audible voice shall sing, but strains raised and re-echoed by the mind too pure for eye to discern." (transl. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker).

41 Cf. Knohl (1995). On the spiritualisation of the sacrificial cult in the Temple of Jerusalem in Philo, see Nikiprowetzsky (1967). Some relevant passages on the topic of silence in Philo are discussed in Schneider (1966), pp. 76–84, and Mortley (1986), pp. 119–121.

42 Cf. Champeux (2001), especially pp. 279–280.

43 Cf., e.g., Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VII 251–254; XIV 57–58; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* II 28;

prayer does not become widespread before the first century CE, a time when it starts to be idealized in some philosophical circles,[44] but also in the Jewish and Christian milieus.[45] Two textual references seem to have been crucial for this evolution: the former is the story about Hanna in *1 Samuel* 1, 12–13 (Hanna praying in silence and being heard by God in spite of the reluctant attitude of the priest Eli); the latter is *Matthew* 6, 6: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father in secret (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ), and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."[46] So, one could say that Porphyry and Plotinus lived in a time when silent prayer became a relatively common practice in the Mediterranean religious traditions.

Even if Plotinus did not devote a special treatise or section to the topic of prayer, the idea of an intellectual, silent prayer addressed to God is attested in more than one passage in the *Enneads*.[47] Silent prayer has mainly the function of a religious metaphor for the conversion of the soul to the superior hypostases, but sometimes we could also suspect a practical aspect, too:

> Let us speak of it [*scil.* the One] in this way, first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone.[48]

Apology 54, 7. More evidence in Sudhaus (1906), 197–200; Van der Horst (1994), 7–9; Freyburger (2000); (2001), 34–36.

44 Cf., e.g., Cicero, *De diuinatione* I 129: *Vt enim deorum animi sine oculis, sine auribus, sine lingua sentiunt inter se, quidquid quisque sentiat* (*ex quo fit, ut homines, etiam cum taciti optent quid aut voveant, non dubitent, quin di illud exaudiant*) […] "For, as the souls of the gods, without the intervention of eyes or ears or tongue, understand each other and what each one thinks (hence men, even when they offer silent prayers and vows, have no doubt that the gods understand them)" […] (Transl. W. Armistead Falconer); Seneca, *Epistula* XLI 1.

45 Cf. Schneider (1966), pp. 68–69; Van der Horst (1994), pp. 12–21, for Jewish and Christian evidence from the first centuries CE.

46 *Matthew* 6, 6: σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχῃ, εἴσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖόν σου καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρί σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ· καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι. Cf. *1 Thess.* 5, 17.

47 On prayer in the *Enneads*, see the contributions of John Dillon and Michael Wakoff in this volume (see *supra*, pp. 7–25 and 73–87). See also Rist (1967), pp. 199–212; Laurent (1999).

48 Plotinus, *Ennead* V 1 [10], 6.8–11 (transl. Armstrong): Ὧδε οὖν λεγέσθω θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐπικαλεσαμένοις οὐ λόγῳ γεγωνῷ, ἀλλὰ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκτείνασιν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον, εὔχεσθαι τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον δυναμένους μόνους πρὸς μόνον. Cf. ibid. V 5 [32], 3; V 8 [31], 9. The first and the latter passages are also discussed by John Dillon and Michael Wakoff. See *supra*, pp. 15 n. 26, 75 and n. 6.

This kind of prayer is nothing other than a form of contemplation. Given Plotinus' minimal interest in traditional religious rituals, it is hardly surprising that he does not speak about genuine forms of prayer very much. However, in some very interesting passages he alludes to petitionary prayers addressed to the sun or to other stars perceived as a kind of magical activity. Plotinus considers that this kind of prayer is effective as a natural result of cosmic sympathy,[49] but it cannot affect the Intellect; the parts of the universe affect each other, and that makes possible and effective astrology, magic and prayers:

> And we must not think that other kinds of prayer (εὐχαί) either are freely and deliberately answered: for people charmed by spells (ἐπῳδαί) do not act with free deliberation, nor, when a snake fascinates (γοητεύει) men, does the one who is fascinated understand or perceive what is happening, but he knows only afterwards that he has had the experience; the ruling intellect, however, remains unaffected (ἀπαθές). But, when a man prays to a heavenly body, some influence comes from it upon him or upon another person. But the sun or another heavenly body does not hear his prayers. And that which he prays for comes about because one part is in sympathetic connection with another, just as in one tense string.[50]

So, this form of prayer, though ineffective for the higher part of the soul which is ἀπαθές, nonetheless affects the body and the lower part of the soul (descended into the physical world) which are under the influence of cosmic sympathy.

This kind of prayer can be compared with Porphyry's theurgic prayer whose influence is also limited to the lower part of the soul. I think I am not wrong if I conclude that the Plotinian distinction between two kinds of prayer, intellectual (contemplation of God by the intellect) and "magical", anticipates Porphyry's distinction between silent and theurgic prayer. In fact, if Porphyry found a solution to the problem raised in the *Letter to Anebo* by postulating the existence of two, hierarchically disposed kinds of prayer, this solution could

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49 On the notion of 'sympathy' in Plotinus, see Gurtler (1984).

50 Plotinus, *Ennead* IV 4 [28], 40.28–41.4 (transl. Armstrong): Καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δὲ εὐχὰς οὐ τῆς προαιρέσεως ἀκουούσης οἰητέον· οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ θελγόμενοι ταῖς ἐπῳδαῖς οὕτως, οὐδ' ὅταν γοητεύῃ ὄφις ἀνθρώπους, σύνεσιν ὁ γοητευόμενος ἔχει, οὐδ' αἰσθάνεται, ἀλλὰ γινώσκει, ἤδη παθών, ὅτι πέπονθεν, ἀπαθὲς δ' αὐτῷ τὸ ἡγούμενόν ἐστιν. Ὧι δ' ηὔξατο, ἦλθέ τι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξ ἐκείνου ἢ πρὸς ἄλλον. Ὁ δὲ ἥλιος ἢ ἄλλο ἄστρον οὐκ ἐπαίει. Καὶ γίνεται τὸ κατὰ τὴν εὐχὴν συμπαθοῦς μέρους μέρει γενομένου, ὥσπερ ἐν μιᾷ νευρᾷ τεταμένῃ; cf. ibid. IV 4 [28], 26 and 42. The 'magical' character of petitionary prayer in Plotinus is discussed by Michael Wakoff (see *supra*, p. 74). See also Esser (1967), pp. 30–34; Rist (1967), pp. 206–207.

have been suggested by some key passages in the *Enneads*. In these passages Plotinus concedes, for philosophical reasons, the efficacy of genuine prayers, but he subordinated it to a superior, silent and intellectual kind of prayer, which corresponds to the act of contemplation of the νοῦς. As a conclusion, one could say that the key elements of Porphyry's theory of prayer are already shaped in the *Enneads*.

The idea, expressed by Plotinus and Porphyry, of an intellectual communication between man and God which defines the philosophical notion of "silent prayer", has a counterpart in the Middle Platonic idea of an intellectual language of δαίμονες, an idea developed by Plutarch in relation to the question how Socrates was able to receive messages from his personal δαίμων. In *De genio Socratis*, Plutarch states that this specific language "was probably not spoken language (φθόγγος), but the λόγος of a δαίμων which, making voiceless (ἄνευ φωνῆς) contact with his intelligence by their sense alone (αὐτῷ τῷ δηλουμένῳ τοῦ νοοῦντος)."[51] The idea had a Neoplatonic posterity,[52] but already from Plutarch's time the intellectual reception of divine messages and the intellectual prayer could be seen as two complementary and mutually dependent ideas.

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51 Plutarch, *De genio Socratis* 588 E (transl. Ph.H. de Lacy, B. Einarson): [τὸ δὲ προσπῖπτον] οὐ φθόγγον ἀλλὰ λόγον ἄν τις εἰκάσειε δαίμονος ἄνευ φωνῆς ἐφαπτόμενον αὐτῷ τῷ δηλουμένῳ τοῦ νοοῦντος.

52 See Timotin (2016a).

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Prayer in Neoplatonism and the *Chaldaean Oracles*

Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus

Luc Brisson

Like many other Platonic dialogues, the *Timaeus* begins and ends with an invocation to the gods, or prayer:

> Socrates.—Why don't you make an invocation to the gods, as we customarily do?
>
> Timaeus.—That I will, Socrates. Surely anyone with any sense at all will always call upon a god before setting out on any venture, whatever its importance. In our case, we are about to make speeches about the universe—whether it has an origin or even it does not—and so if we're not to go completely astray we have no choice but to call upon the gods and goddesses, and pray that they above all will approve of all we have to say, and that in consequence we will, too. Let this, then, be our appeal to the gods; to ourselves we must appeal to make sure that you learn as easily as possible, and that I instruct you in the subject matter before us in the way that best conveys my intent.[1]

In his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Proclus comments on this prayer found at the beginning of Timaeus' speech, although his commentary stops before the end of the dialogue.[2]

Proclus does not mention prayer as practiced in the traditional religion of ancient Greece.[3] His commentary assimilates the man who is praying, Timaeus of Locri, to the Orphic Zeus, and describes the content of the prayer by means of its definition as found in the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

1 *Timaeus* 27c–d, transl. D.J. Zeyl.

2 On the theory of prayer in Neoplatonism, see Esser (1967); Hoffmann (2010); Layne (2013). The article by Ph. Hoffmann was very useful. It provided a wealth of information on the texts quoted and commented in this paper.

3 On prayer in traditional Greek religion, see Rudhardt (1958), 187–201. The author deals with several types of prayer: invocation, petition, promise, consultation, expression of gratitude. And Burkert (1985), 70–75.

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The Orphic Rhapsodies?

Proclus refers not to the traditional divinities, but to three Orphic divinities: Night, Kronos, and Zeus. He establishes a parallel between Timaeus of Locri, who will give an account of the fashioning of the universe, and the Orphic Zeus, who, having swallowed everything that existed before him, brings everything out in order to make our world appear. Previously, he seeks advice from his grandmother Night, who is uttering oracles, and addresses an invocation to his father Kronos, whom he has chained up beforehand:

> But before dealing with the subject matter in its entirety, he turns his attention to invocations (παρακλήσεις) of the gods and prayers (καὶ εὐχὰς),[4] imitating in this way too the maker of the universe, who before undertaking the entire creative task is said to enter the oracular shrine of Night to fill himself with divine thoughts from there, to receive the principles of the creative task and, if it is permissible to speak thus, to resolve all difficulties and above all to encourage his father to collaborate with him in the creative task.[5]

Let us recall the episodes of the Orphic theogony to which Proclus is referring here.[6]

Night is the mother, spouse, and daughter of Phanes, the first god. She engenders Ouranos and Gaia, who give birth to the Titans, one of whom is Kronos. Kronos is husband of Rheia, who gives him several children, including Zeus. In order to maintain his power, Kronos swallows his children, except Zeus, for whom a stone has been substituted. Night informs Zeus, when he comes to consult her, that he will be the fifth king, and instructs him in what he must do.[7] On the occasion of a banquet organized by his wife Rheia, Kronos gets drunk.[8] He falls into a deep sleep, and Zeus takes advantage of the opportunity to chain him up and then castrate him.[9] Zeus frees his brothers and sisters, and seizes power.[10] Having succeeded, thanks to the thunderbolt which the

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4 The καὶ is epexegetic.

5 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 206.26–207.2 Diehl (transl. D.T. Runia and M. Share).

6 See Brisson (1987).

7 *Orphicorum Fragmenta* [*OF*], fr. 107 Kern [= fr. 165, 167, 169, 170, 174, 190, 219, 227, 336, 367 Bernabé]; see also fr. 105 Kern [= fr. 113, 164, 208, 209 Bernabé].

8 *OF*, fr. 180 Kern [= fr. 228, 274 Bernabé].

9 *OF*, fr. 154 Kern [= fr. 187, 220, 222, 225 Bernabé].

10 *OF*, fr. 157 Kern [= fr. 166, 230 Bernabé].

Cyclops gave him,[11] in defeating the Titans who had risen up against him,[12] Zeus hurls his adversaries into Tartarus.[13] Night then advises Zeus to proceed to a new "creation".[14] To do so, Zeus swallows the first god Phanes, and therefore everything that preceded him.[15] He then restores all things, fashioning a new world—ours—which is his body. All things are reunited in Zeus, and they constitute the universe in his divine body.[16]

Proclus establishes a parallel between this fashioning of the world and the narration of Timaeus of Locri. This parallelism may seem strange, but it is in line with the method of exegesis practiced by Proclus, who took his inspiration from Syrianus.[17] Considering the second part of the *Parmenides* as a treatise of scientific theology that describes the appearance of the various classes of gods from the One,[18] Proclus wished to establish an agreement between Plato's scientific theology, on the one hand, and on the other the *Orphic Rhapsodies*, the paradigmatic theology of the Greeks, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the paradigmatic theology of the Barbarians. It was essential to bring these three sources together, since true discourse and theology, that is, the discourse on the gods which can only be true, are naturally synonymous. Here, the reconciliation is carried out with the *Orphic Rhapsodies*, while the *Chaldaean Oracles* will be amply used in what follows.

The *Chaldaean Oracles*

In chapter 27 of his *Life of Proclus*, Marinus tells how Syrianus had proposed to his students, Proclus and Domninus, to explain to them either the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphic Rhapsodies*. But the disagreement between Proclus, who chose the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and Domninus, who had chosen the Orphic poems, prevented him from carrying out his project. This event can be situated within history. It was in 432 (probably in September) that Proclus undertook at Athens, under the guidance of Syrianus, the study of the authors to be ex-

11 *OF*, fr. 179 Kern [= 269 Bernabé].
12 *OF*, fr. 120 Kern [= 232 Bernabé].
13 *OF*, fr. 158 Kern [= 233 Bernabé].
14 *OF*, fr. 165, 166 Kern [= fr. 237 Bernabé].
15 *OF*, fr. 129, 167 Kern [= fr. 182, 239, 240, 241 Bernabé].
16 *OF*, fr. 168 Kern [= fr. 243 Bernabé].
17 See Brisson (1987).
18 See Saffrey-Westerink (1968), lv–lxxxix.

plained in the Academy: Aristotle, Plato, and the Theologians (ch. 13). However, the dissent between Proclus and Domninus prevented Syrianus from completing his program. He did not have time to set forth the principles of the Chaldaeans, besides the principles of Orphism, in a series of classes to which Proclus must be alluding in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* (I 315.2), when he speaks of *Classes on Orphism* (*Ὀρφικαὶ συνουσίαι*). We cannot tell whether it was before or after these classes that Syrianus wrote his *Commentaries on Orpheus*, that is, very probably, *On the theology of Orpheus* and *The agreement between Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Chaldaean Oracles*. Proclus studied these works shortly after his teacher's death, in order to perfect his knowledge of Orphism. It was in the margins of these books that, at the request of Marinus, he later wrote lengthy remarks. Moreover, Syrianus did not reserve his exegesis of the Orphic poems for the last stage of his teaching program, but must have had recourse to it during his reading with commentary of Plato's various dialogues. This is clearly shown by the *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, in which Hermias collected notes that reproduce the oral teaching of Syrianus in the context of classes attended by Proclus.

The *Chaldaean Oracles* were written in a Middle-Platonic atmosphere, and the fundamental triad they advance recalls the doctrine of the three Intellects in Numenius. This is why Proclus cites the texts from the *Chaldaean Oracles* to describe the third triad of the intelligible gods as well as the intelligible-intellective and the intellective gods.

As far as we can tell, the world vision reflected by the *Chaldaean Oracles* is akin to that found in religious tendencies of the beginning of the Empire. Here, the whole of reality is made up of three overlapping worlds. 1) The world of fire, home of the intelligible alone: the gods have their seat in this first world, and here, distant and inaccessible, dwells the first Father of all spiritual entities. 2) The ethereal world, probably a mixture of fire and air, contains the heavenly bodies (stars and planets). This second world is the scene of part of the soul's journey as it seeks to return towards the principles, where it meets the Teletarchs, responsible for helping it in its ascent. 3) Finally, the material world includes the sublunary world, including the four elements (fire, air, earth and water), and the entire terrestrial world, a world given over to becoming, birth, and death, whence the soul must escape by purifying itself by means of the techniques of theurgy. In this lower world, the soul must confront matter, as well as the evil demons attached to it.

The fundamental triad in the *Chaldaean Oracles* is that of Father-Power-Intellect.

– The figure of the first God is contradictory. On the one hand, he is completely separated from the world, and virtually unknowable; he is called "hid-

den world"[19] and "paternal abyss". At the same time, however, he receives a series of positive attributes, such as Father, paternal Intellect, Source or Monad.[20] Elsewhere in the *Oracles*, he is called fire,[21] or Intellect that contemplates itself. The Father's only function is to think himself: in conformity with the interpretation of Platonic thought defended by the Middle Platonists, he contains the Ideas, the famous Iynges, within himself,[22] and thinks them.

– Besides this first Intellect, there exists a second one, the demiurge, whose role is to produce the sensible world on the model of these Ideas. This Intellect is no longer unique, like the first one, but a split has already taken place within him, and he can turn towards the intelligible world or towards the sensible. The second God projects the "divisions" or "lightning bolts" (the Ideas), "passwords" and "symbols" into the "wombs" of the world soul, and into matter.[23]

– Between these gods, we find a third divine entity, a feminine deity often identified with Hecate. This is why she is qualified as an "intermediary center". Her action is twofold: she dissociates and associates. Like a membrane, she keeps the first and second Intellect separate, and she associates them insofar as she is assimilated to a "generative womb", which seems to mean that she is the spouse of the first Intellect and the mother of the second.[24]

In short, before undertaking his speech on the fabrication of the sensible world, Timaeus imitates Zeus, who, for his part, before proceeding to fashion the real world—our own—invokes gods. Proclus continues: "It is necessary, therefore, that before all else we obtain some clear knowledge about prayer, what is its nature, how to reach perfection, and from where it is instilled in souls." (*In Tim.* I 207.21–23). In what follows, he will try to answer the three questions that have just been raised, using the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

What Does Prayer Consist In?

In what does prayer consist? To answer this first question, Proclus refers to Porphyry and Iamblichus of the *Chaldaean Oracles*,[25] before stating his own view.[26]

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19 *Chaldaean Oracles* [*CO*], fr. 198 and 18 des Places.

20 *CO*, fr. 1, 7, 11, 13, 30 des Places.

21 *CO*, fr. 3, 5 des Places.

22 *CO*, fr. 5, 8, 33, 39 des Places.

23 *CO*, fr. 5, 33, 35, 37 des Places.

24 *CO*, fr. 6 des Places.

25 On the influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles* on Neoplatonism, see Hadot (1978).

26 See L. Brisson, "La *pístis* chez Plotin et chez Porphyre. Philosophie et religion", in press.

Porphyry

Proclus begins by evoking Porphyry, in a long passage[27] akin to that of the *Letter to Marcella*. In the *Letter to Marcella*, Porphyry, after evoking the misery of the impious who, out of ignorance, do not accept either the existence or the providence of the gods, because of their lack of faith (chapter 22), explains that true cult implies the practice of virtue and wisdom, since an irrational faith that is not associated with a virtuous life cannot reach the divinity through cult and prayer (chapter 23).

> No God causes evils for a man; rather he himself causes them by the choices he makes for himself. The prayer accompanying shameful deeds is impure and thus unacceptable to God; that accompanying good deeds is pure as well as quite acceptable. Let four basic virtues[28] in particular be firmly held with regard to God: *faith*, *truth*, *love*, *hope*. For it is necessary to have *faith* that conversion toward god is the only salvation; and for the faithful to be as eager as possible to know the *truth* about him; and for this knower to *love* the one who is known; and for the lover to nourish his soul throughout life on good *hopes*. For by good hopes the good prevail over the wicked.[29]

Prayer is no longer a matter of supplication or vows; it is defined as the soul's conversion toward the divinity, as its return toward its cause and origin, with this conversion ensuring its salvation. Yet this movement of the soul toward its origin has a chance of reaching its goal only if it is associated with a pure life, and especially with the four virtues of faith, truth, love, and hope. The hope of achieving the goal is thus based on a faith that implies knowledge of the divinity and is prolonged into an act of love. To undertake this process of conversion, one must believe that it will be crowned with success. One must first know what should be believed about the divinity, and have the desire to join with it, the hope of achieving this goal being obligatory. Faith, which constitutes the starting-point for this process, is thus opposed to the irrational faith of the Christians,[30] and takes its place within the conception of prayer articulated in

27 Proclus, *In Tim.* I, 207.24–209.1 Diehl.

28 This is how I translate *stoikheîa*.

29 Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 24.1–11 (transl. K. O'Brien Wicker).

30 As Ph. Hoffmann points out in his article, many papers have been written on the possible relations between the Porphyrian tetrad of virtues and the Pauline triad (*1Cor* 13, 13). In view of the unlikelihood of a direct relation, the hypothesis has been made of a relation in

the *Chaldaean Oracles*. In fact, Porphyry is referring to the doctrine of prayer developed by the *Chaldaean Oracles*.[31] This doctrine is based on a group of four virtues: faith, truth, love, hope, mentioned in this order or in a different order by many Neoplatonists. The reference to the *Chaldaean Oracles* is, of course, undeniable, but one does not find any relation to theurgy in Porphyry, a point on which Porphyry, in his *Letter to Anebo the Egyptian*,[32] criticizes Iamblichus, who answers him in the *De mysteriis*.[33]

Iamblichus

It is also in relation to a doctrine of prayer from the *Chaldaean Oracles* that Iamblichus evokes three of these terms: love, hope, and faith. This passage must be reinserted within the more general context of Iamblichus' *Answer to Porphyry*.

For Iamblichus,[34] prayer is the soul's ascent back toward its principle. It is soteriological in nature, but it is now no more than an appendix to a section on sacrifice, integrated within the practice of theurgy,[35] which Iamblichus seeks to defend against the criticisms of Porphyry. Theurgy[36] delimits a place on earth in which it is appropriate to offer a sacrifice to each god. Prayer is thus always associated with a sacrifice, where each mutually fortifies the other. The efficacy of sacrifices is brought to perfection by prayer, which makes knowledge of the gods more perfect:

> I declare, then, that the first stage of prayer is the introductory, which leads to contact and acquaintance with the divine; the second is conjunctive, producing a union of sympathetic minds, and calling forth benefactions sent down by the gods even before we express our requests, while achieving whole courses of action even before we think of them; the most

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which the Gnostics played the part of mediators: Hoffmann (2010), 277–287. I do not have the time here to refute this hypothesis, but several arguments seem to me to disqualify it.

31 *CO*, fr. 45, 46, 47 des Places. See Saffrey (1981).

32 Porphyre, *Lettre à Anébon l'Égyptien*, Texte établi, traduit et commenté par H.D. Saffrey et A.-Ph. Segonds, Paris, 2012.

33 Jamblique, *Réponse à Porphyre* (*De Mysteriis*). Texte établi, traduit et commenté par H.D. Saffrey et A.-Ph. Segonds, avec la collaboration d'Adrien Lecerf, Paris, 2013.

34 On Iamblichus' theory of prayer, see Timotin (2014). For a comparison between Iamblichus and Proclus on the question of prayer, see Dillon (1973), Appendix A: "Iamblichus' theory of prayer", 407–411.

35 See Saffrey (1984a).

36 See Shaw (1995).

> perfect, finally, has as its mark ineffable unification, which establishes all authority in the gods, and provides that our souls rest completely in them.[37]
>
> According to the distinction of these three levels, then, which measure out the whole range of interaction with the divine, prayer establishes links of friendship between us and the gods, and secures for us the triple advantage which we gain from the gods through theurgy, the first leading to illumination, the second to the common achievement of projects, and the third to the perfect fulfillment (of the soul) through fire. And sometimes prayer comes after sacrifices, sometimes, again, it comes in the middle of theurgic activity, and at other times it brings sacrifices to a suitable conclusion; but no sacred act can take place without the supplications contained in prayers.[38]

Iamblichus distinguishes three stages of prayer, always connected to theurgical rites, which confer three benefits. The first one gathers us together, brings us closer, and leads to contact with the divinity, making us become aware of it. This initial cognitive stage is followed by a conjunctive stage, a community of action with the divine which carries out theurgical operations automatically, as it were. Finally, a stable state is established, which consists in the soul being established among the gods themselves. A benefit corresponds to each of these types of prayer: the first one leads to cognitive illumination; the second to an active association with the gods, and the third to perfect assimilation to the divine.

This is where the four basic virtues come into play—faith and hope being inseparable—associated with the three stages of prayer and the resulting benefits:

> Extended practice of prayer nurtures our intellect, enlarges very greatly our souls' receptivity to the gods, reveals to men the life of the gods, accustoms their eyes to the brightness of divine light, and gradually brings to perfection the capacity of our faculties for contact with the gods, until it leads us up to the highest level of *consciousness* (of which we are capable); also it elevates gently the dispositions of our minds, and communicates

37 Perhaps a reference to *CO*, fr. 130 des Places. See also Plotinus, *Enn.* IV 8 [6], 1, 5–8; VI 9 [9], 11, 11–16.

38 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* V 26, 177.11–20 Saffrey-Segonds (transl. by E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon and J.P. Hershbell).

> to us those of the gods, stimulates persuasion and communion and indissoluble friendship, augments divine *love*, kindles the divine elements in the soul, scours away all contrary tendencies within it, casts out from the aetherial and luminous vehicle[39] surrounding the soul everything that tends to generation, brings to perfection good *hope* and *faith* concerning the light; and, in a word, it renders those who employ prayers, if we may so express it, the familiar consorts of the gods.[40]

Compared to the one described by Porphyry, the order proposed by Iamblichus is different, insofar as faith, associated with hope, is cited last. It can be assumed, however, that this is a mere displacement: faith, the initial virtue, makes a wager on the future, and this wager is transformed, as the result of a successful process, into the hope of a permanent state. Hope thus has an inherent soteriological dimension.[41]

Proclus

After these two references to Porphyry and Iamblichus, Proclus moves on to his own interpretation which prolongs that of Iamblichus, and which refers to his philosophical system, to the *Chaldaean Oracles* and to theurgy.

Prayer in Its Philosophical Context

In order to understand this doctrine of prayer, one must remember that it is based on these three assumptions of the Neoplatonic system. 1) All beings proceed from the gods, that is the henads and ultimately from the One. 2) All beings remain among the gods. 3) All beings convert toward the gods:

> All things, therefore, both remain in and revert to the gods, receiving this ability from them and obtaining in their very being a double password (συνθήματα),[42] the one in order to remain there,[43] the other so that what

39 See Toulouse (2002); Van Liefferinge (1999), 170 sq. See *CO*, fr. 120 et 104 des Places.

40 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* v 26, 177.21–178.10 Saffrey-Segonds (transl. by E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon and J.P. Hershbell).

41 See Hoffmann (2010), 294–295.

42 On that doctrine, see Saffrey (1999).

43 According to the rule that effects always remain in their causes, even if the effect has proceeded outside its cause. Thanks to this remaining (μόνη), one may say that the effect remains within the gods.

> proceeds forth can return.[44] And it is possible to observe these not only in souls, but also in the lifeless beings that follow them. For what else is it that produces the sympathy that they have towards the diverse powers than the fact that they have obtained symbols[45] from gods? Nature is in fact suspended from the world above and the gods themselves, and she is distributed in relation with the ranks of the gods. She thus also instills in the bodies the passwords of affinity to their gods, in the one case solar passwords, in another lunar, in others those of other gods, and she causes these things to revert to the gods as well, some to the gods in general, others to specific gods, bringing her products to completion in accordance with the various characteristics of the gods.[46]

The second part of the *Parmenides* describes the procession of the gods and of all beings from the One. But beings are not separated from their source. The One and the gods are always present to them, for effects always remain in their cause. This is true not only of souls, but also of inanimate objects. The principle of this presence within bodies is sympathy, associated with Nature, the lower part of the world soul, which implants "reasons" (λόγοι) within matter. This is the same soul to which particular souls and the lower part of the world soul—that is, Nature, which produces inanimate beings—belong. Each class has thus received the characters corresponding to the class of gods to which it is attached. These "reasons" (λόγοι) are, in the vocabulary of the *Chaldaean oracles*, signs, symbols, or passwords which the soul is to use to rise back up to its principle. The presence of "reasons" (λόγοι) that attach these inanimate beings to classes of gods enables prayer and the celebration of rites in the context of theurgy, which allows souls to rise back up toward their principle. Prayer and rituals, using these marks, signs, symbols, or passwords, enable souls to rise back up toward their principle, which Proclus describes in these terms:

> This process, the demiurge[47] too had much earlier effectuated in the case of the souls, giving them passwords so that they could both remain and revert, on the one hand establishing them in being in accordance with the One, on the other hand graciously bestowing on them the ability to

44 See also Proclus, *In Tim.* I 209, 21–26 Diehl. This explains why even inanimate beings can pray; see Proclus, *De Sacrificio* 148.24–18.

45 In ancient Greek, σύμβολον is a synonym of σύνθημα. It is an object cut into two; putting the object back together constitutes a sign of recognition.

46 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 210. 11–26 Diehl.

47 The Demiurge in the *CO*.

> revert in accordance with Intellect. It is to this reversion that prayer offers an enormous contribution by means of the ineffable symbols of the gods, which the Father of the souls has sowed in them.[48]

These λόγοι sowed by the demiurge—that is, the third element of the intelligible-intellective monad, or Zeus in the *Chaldaean Oracles* and in the *Orphic Rhapsodies*—do not have only a constitutive aspect; they are the traces (ἴχνη) of the intelligible within the sensible. They can therefore be considered as symbols (σύμβολα) and passwords (συνθήματα), that is, as the starting points for rising up toward the principal divinity. In this perspective, faith (πίστις) consists in recognizing these symbols and passwords. Truth (ἀληθεία) consists of the study of the intelligible, love (ἔρως) consists in assimilation to the intelligible, and hope (ἐλπίς) consists in the possibility of a fusion of the soul, which is identified with the intelligible, with the One. We thus have here a description of the process of conversion in Neoplatonism, associated with the doctrine of the *Chaldaean Oracles*. In this perspective, prayer is no longer a way of calling upon the gods to ask them a favor, but an ascent toward them as the result of a rational process.

How Does Prayer Reach Perfection?

Like Iamblichus in the *De mysteriis*, Proclus continues by describing first the advantages contributed by prayer, at its different stages, before enumerating the fundamental virtues attached to prayer:

> Prayer attracts the beneficence of the gods towards itself. It unifies those who pray with the gods who are being prayed to. It also links the Intellect of the gods with the formulations of those who pray, inciting the will of those who contain the goods in a perfect way within themselves to share them unstintingly. Prayer is the demiurge of divine persuasion[49] and establishes all which is ours in the gods.
>
> Perfect and true prayer is conducted as follows, (1) First there is the knowledge (γνῶσις) of all the divine ranks to which the person who prays draws near. For he would not approach them in the appropriate manner

48 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 210.27–211.8 Diehl.

49 At *Gorgias* 453a, rhetoric is defined as the demiurge of persuasion. Proclus takes up the expression to link it to prayer. Here, persuasion corresponds to faith.

(ἐγνωκώς) if he did not know the characteristics (ἰδιότητας) of each of them. For this reason the Oracle too has commanded that the "fire-heated conception"[50] has the very first rank in the holy cult.[51] (2) Second after this comes the process of assimilation (οἰκείωσις)[52] which takes place through becoming like the divine (κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοίωσιν) in respect of complete purity, chastity, education and ordered disposition. Through this we direct what is ours towards the gods, extracting their goodwill and submitting our soul to them. (3) Third comes touching, through which we make contact (συναφή)[53] with the divine reality (τῆς θείας οὐσίας) with the topmost part of our soul and incline towards it. (4) Next there is the "approaching" (ἐμπέλασις),[54] for this is what the Oracle calls it: 'For the mortal who approaches the fire directly will possess light from the gods'.[55] Allowing us greater communion (κοινωνία) with the gods and a more transparent participation in their light. (5) Finally there is unification (ἕνωσις),[56] which establishes the unity of the soul in the unity of the gods, causing there to be a single activity (μίαν ἐνέργειαν)[57] of us and them, in accordance with which we no longer belong to ourselves but to the gods, remaining in the divine light and encircled in its embrace. This is the supreme limit of true prayer, enabling it to link together the reversion (ἐπιστροφὴν), with the rest (μονῇ),[58] to re-establish in the unity of the gods all that proceeded from it, and to enclose the light in us with the light of the gods.

It is no small contribution, then, that prayer makes to the entire ascent of the souls.[59] Nor is it the case that the person who possesses virtue does not need the goods that come additionally through prayer, but rather

50 *CO*, fr. 139 des Places: τὴν πυριθαλπῆ ἔννοιαν (p. 56 Kroll). The soul is a spark, and the intelligible is fire. So the soul is ignited by the knowledge of the intelligible.

51 The first two stages of prayer in Proclus correspond to the first stage in Iamblichus.

52 As we can see from what follows, this is assimilation to the intelligible gods.

53 The third and fourth stage of prayer in Proclus, correspond to the second in Iamblichus.

54 This stage is one of the highest in the *Oracle of Apollo* in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* (23.15–16): Τέλος γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ σκοπὸς ἦν τὸ ἑνωθῆναι καὶ πελάσαι τῷ ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεῷ.

55 *CO*, fr. 121 des Places: τῷ πυρὶ γὰρ βροτὸς ἐμπελάσας θεόθεν φάος ἕξει. Fire is the intelligible, which comes from the Father and the other gods.

56 The third and last stage of prayer in Iamblichus. For the union of the soul with the henads, see Van den Berg (2001), 46, 89 sq. The henadic gods are the true addressees of perfect prayers.

57 The ultimate goal of theurgical power: fusion of the soul with the henadic gods.

58 This fusion should be permanent.

59 See Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* V 26, 176.20–177.2.

the complete opposite. It is through prayer that the ascent is brought to completion and it is with prayer that the crown of virtue is attained, namely piety towards the gods.[60] In short, none other should pray but the person who is especially good, as the Athenian stranger says: 'for this person the [practice of] conversing with the gods becomes highly effective for obtaining the life of well-being, whereas in the case of the wicked[61] it is natural for the opposite to occur, for it is not permissible that the impure come in contact with what is pure'.[62]

The person, therefore, who has nobly undertaken the [practice of] prayer should make the gods propitious and awaken within himself the conceptions concerning the gods—for [recollection of] the kindness of one's superiors is the very first encouragement to sharing in their being. He should be unceasingly occupied with the cult of divinity. 'For in the case of the mortal who spends time in prayer the blessed ones are swift to answer'.[63] He should preserve unshaken the right order of his acts towards the gods and set before himself *virtues* that purify him from the realm of generation and cause him to ascend, and also *faith* and *truth* and *love*, that renowned triad, as well as *hope* of good things and unchanging receptivity to the divine light and ecstasy separating him from all other preoccupations, so that he is united alone with god alone and does not attempt to join himself to unity while in the company of plurality. For such a person does the complete opposite and separates himself from the gods. Just as it is not permissible to converse with being in the company of non-being, so it is not permissible to be joined to unity in the company of plurality.[64]

Unlike Iamblichus, Proclus distinguishes five levels in prayer, which contribute three benefits, as in Iamblichus: cognitive illumination, an active association with the gods, and perfect assimilation to the divine:

60 Cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* I 212, 5 sq. Diehl.

61 Plato, *Laws* IV 716d–e.

62 Plato, *Phaedo* 67b.

63 *CO*, fr. 140 des Places: δηθύνοντι γὰρ βροτῷ κραιπνοὶ μάκαρες τελέθουσιν. This quotation must be understood in a positive sense. As *in Resp.* 1.109.17–19 Kroll. That is why our translation is different from Festugière's. The literary model is probably: παντοῖοι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας,/ ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντες (*Od.* XVII, 486–487).

64 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 211.8–212.28 Diehl. See Saffrey (1984b), 175 [= Saffrey (1990), 219].

1. The first stage is constituted by the knowledge of the classes of the gods, which is the subject of the *Elements of Theology* and of the *Platonic Theology*. This is also the case in Iamblichus, who, however, associates this stage with contact.
2. The second phase consists in assimilating oneself to these gods who are known. This is the slogan of the Platonists: to become similar to god, especially on the level of moral behavior.
3. Next comes contact between the highest part of our soul—that is, the intellect—, and what is highest in the Intelligible. One might think of the identification between the soul and the intellect at the level of the paradigmatic virtues.
4. Next comes communion, which is probably an allusion to the henads.
5. Finally, there is unification, or union with the One.

As we can see, prayer is an ascent toward the first gods, or henads, and the first stage of this ascent is theological knowledge, which corresponds to scientific theology, the subject of the *Elements of Theology* and the *Platonic Theology*. Yet this process has no chance of ending in success unless it is accompanied by a good life, which implies the practice of the virtues: *trust* and *truth* and *love*, that renowned triad, as well as *hope*.

Whence is Prayer Instilled in the Soul

In this group of virtues, love holds a particular place, owing to its links with Eros, the god who presides over philosophy.[65] So according to the three assumptions of the Neoplatonic system mentioned above: 1) all beings proceed from the gods, and ultimately from the One; 2) all beings remain among the gods; 3) all beings convert toward the gods, it is important to link love as a virtue in the soul to the god Eros (Love).

Hence, in his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, Proclus raises three questions concerning Eros: where then did *Eros* (*Love*) come for the first time, how does he go forth to all things[66] and along with what monads[67] did he leap forth into being?[68] He will answer each of these questions.

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65 Plato, *Phaidros* 245a–c.

66 These three questions deal with the origin of Eros, his universality, and his place within the system of the monads.

67 See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 21.

68 The verb ἐξέθορε comes from the verb ἐκθρώσκειν, which is present in the *CO*, fr. 35 (v. 1),

Along with What Monads Did Eros Leap Forth into Being?

Proclus begins by situating Eros among the three intelligible monads of Faith, Truth, and Love, establishing them at the outset—in a mode of causal and unitary anticipation—in three henads that are the divine attributes evoked in the *Phaedrus*. Then he describes the hierarchy of its action.

> Now there are three substantial hypostases among the intelligible and hidden gods,[69] and the first is characterized[70] by the *Good*:
>
> Perceiving through the Intellect the *Good* itself, where lies the paternal monad[71] says the oracle, the second by *Wisdom* where lies the first intellection[72] and the third by *Beauty*, where lies the most beautiful of the intelligible, as is the account of *Timaeus*.[73]
>
> Three monads subsist in accordance with these intelligible causes, causally[74] and unitarily[75] existing in the intelligibles, but first revealed in the unutterable order of the gods:[76] these are *Faith*, *Truth* and *Love*;[77] the first founding the universe and establishing it in the good, the second revealing the knowledge that lies in all beings, the third turning back everything and uniting it to the nature of the beautiful.

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37 (v. 3), 42 (v. 1), 34 (v. 1) des Places. See the *Orphic Rhapsodies*; one must consider the correspondence with Orphism. Love comes from an intelligible cause.

69 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 162. These are the henads that are hidden because linked to the One, and intelligible because linked to the Intelligibles.

70 Since no definition could state their essence (since the henads are situated beyond being), they are simply characterized by an ἰδιότης.

71 *CO*, fr. 11 des Places: τἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ νοοῦσα, ὅπου πατρικὴ μονάς ἐστι. See the Annex.

72 This expression designates the first of the ten types of intellection distinguished by Proclus (*In Tim.* I 243.26–246.9 Diehl). It corresponds to the first level, that of Being. The second one is that of Life, and the third that of Intellect.

73 This is the Living-Being-in-Itself; see Plato, *Timaeus* 30c–d. The Living-Being-in-Itself is classified within the third triad of the intelligibles (*Platonic Theology* III 15. 52.13–54.20 Saffrey-Westerink; and III 18. 62.11–64.12 Saffrey-Westerink). Yet the first Beauty is prior to the Living-Being-in-Itself; see Proclus, *In Tim.* I 433.26–434.17 Diehl. Note the parallel with the Orphic Phanes.

74 Anticipated presence of the effect in the cause.

75 The term ἑνοειδῶς, a synonym of ἑνιαίως on a different level, indicates the mode of presence, by anticipation, of the effect in its cause; see Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 118.

76 The term ἄφθεγκτος appears in the *CO*, fr. 191 des Places. It qualifies the Iynges, the first level of the intelligible-intellectives (see *CO*, fr. 76–77 des Places).

77 We are at the level of the henads on which the monads are dependent.

> This triad proceeds thenceforward to all the divine orders and radiates to all union with the intelligible; it reveals itself differently according to different orders, combining its own functions with the individual characters of the gods.[78] Sometimes, as we said, it is present in a manner unspeakable, unknowable and unitary,[79] sometimes as holding and binding together,[80] sometimes as perfective and formative,[81] sometimes intelligently and paternally,[82] sometimes as imparting movement and life[83] and productively,[84] sometimes sovereignly and assimilatively, sometimes freely and purely,[85] sometimes in multiplication and division.[86]
>
> From above, then, *Love* ranges from the Intelligibles to the intra-mundane, making everything revert to the divine beauty, *Truth* illuminating the universe with knowledge, and *Faith* establishing each reality in the Good.
>
> For everything is governed and exists in these three,[87] says the oracle; and for this reason the gods advise the theurgists[88] to unite themselves to god through this triad.[89]

Love or Eros as virtue intervenes at the level of the soul, but they are rooted in the intelligible-intellective triad which has its origin very high in the system.

The origin of Eros is thus to be found among the henads. Proclus distinguishes three of them: the Good, Knowledge, and the Beautiful. The Good in itself is, at that level, the place of supposed residence of the first principle of the *Oracles*, the Father; the second henad is that of Knowledge, because it is the locus of primary Intellection; and the third is Beauty, the most beautiful of the intelligibles.

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78 See the Annex.

79 At the level of the henads. See Proclus, *Elements of theology*, prop. 123, 113, 118.

80 Intermediate member of the intelligible-intellective triad.

81 Third member of the intelligible-intellective triad.

82 Kronos in the intellective triad of the parents.

83 Rheia in the intellective triad of the parents.

84 Zeus in the intellective triad of the parents.

85 The second triad of the intellective gods.

86 At the level of the soul; see the second hypothesis of the second part of the *Parmenides*.

87 *CO*, fr. 48 des Places: πάντα γὰρ ἐν τρισὶ τοῖσδε κυβερνᾶταί τε καὶ ἔστι. The literary model is *Iliad* XIV 282.

88 As for Iamblichus, prayer is linked with theurgy.

89 Proclus, *in Alc*. 51.60–53.2 (transl. by W. O'Neill).

According to a descending hierarchy, these henads are causes within the Intelligible: the Good is the cause of Faith; Knowledge is the cause of Truth, and the Beautiful is the cause of Love. These three intelligible monads come from the henads, which themselves derive from the One-Good. In fact, these three monads have as their causes the gods of the henads. The first principle of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the paternal monad, or the Father. Is found at the level of the third intelligible triad, and it corresponds to the triad of Phanes for the Orphics.

These intelligible triads are present in a different mode in the intelligible-intellective triads, especially the Iynges, and then in the first intellective triad of the Parents, including as the third member, Zeus the demiurge: this is why it extends to encosmic beings, including the souls in which one finds love, truth and faith as virtues, giving the souls the opportunity to rise back to their principle using the appropriate passwords.

It should also be noted, once again, that prayer is associated with theurgical rites.

Where Did Eros Come From?

Chapter 22 of Book III (78.15–81.20) of the *Platonic Theology* is devoted to the intelligible gods, which consist in the three triads of being, life, and intellect. In the first triad one finds proportion, which is identical to the good; in the second, knowledge, where truth resides; and in the third, the beautiful. Each of the members of these triads includes three elements: the good contains the desirable, which corresponds to the limiting factor of the first rank; the capable, which corresponds to unlimitedness, and the perfect, which corresponds to what is mixed. The triad of knowledge contains the fact of being filled with being, which is appropriate to the limiting factor of the second rank, the fruitful, which corresponds to potentiality and unlimitedness of the second rank, and the power of converting, which corresponds to the mixed. The third triad of beauty contains these three elements: the lovable, which corresponds to the desirable, and pertains to the limiting factor; the lovely, which belongs to the capable and corresponds to unlimited potentiality, and the third one is the splendid, which announces the lowest order of the intellectives. From this intellect, which corresponds to the paternal Intellect, Eros springs forth:

> Consequently, he admires the man who can show that the intelligible forms can be both unified and distinct, that they do not lose their un-

> mixed purity through union nor their divine communion through separation, but are, according to the Oracle, both distinguished and combined simultaneously 'by the bond of that wonderful god, Eros, who sprang forth first out of Intellect,/ His unifying fire clothed with fire, to mix the mixing-bowls,/ From the source, directing towards them the bloom of his fire.'[90] It is, then, this joint mingling and distinctions that Socrates wants to see among the partless intelligible realities.[91]

Eros is brought about by the very beauty of the intelligible Intellect, identified with the Father of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and his role is to ensure the mixture of opposing realities. Eros is a fire clothed by the fire of his Father whose thoughts are intelligible realities.

How Does He Go Forth to All Things?

From intelligible love which, in the midst of the third intelligible triad, goes forth from the henads of the good, knowledge, and the beautiful, there proceeds intellective love, which is accompanied by faith and truth.[92] It can therefore be said that the members of the Chaldaean triad are situated at the intellective level, even if, according to Proclus, they derive from the three intelligible monads mentioned in the *Phaedrus*. At that level, Eros plays the role of the demiurge fashioning the soul and the bodies.

Evoking the *Chaldaean Oracles*, John Lydus describes the fashioning of the soul as follows: the soul results from a mixture of the intelligible and the sensible, joined by love. The intelligible is the truth, the sensible is πίστις, and the link between the two is love.

> Myth most philosophically hints that the king in Italy Erulus, whom Evander, the son of the prophetess Carmenta, had defeated and acquired his country had been born with three souls, for the Socrates in the *Phaedrus*[93] hands down that the soul has these powers, the mind as a charioteer and the soul's faculties as horses. For this reason also the Oracles enjoin the

90 *CO*, fr. 42 des Places: δεσμῷ Ἔρωτος ἀγητοῦ ὃς ἐκ νόου ἔκθορε πρῶτος/ Ἐσσάμενος πυρὶ πῦρ συνδέσμιον, ὄφρα κεράσῃ/ Πηγαίους κρατῆρας, ἑοῦ πυρὸς ἄνθος ἐπισχών (p. 25 Kroll).

91 Proclus, *In Parm.* II 769. 3–16 = 769. 2–11 Steel (transl. G.R. Morrow and J.M. Dillon).

92 See Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III 22, 81. 15–20 Saffrey-Westerink.

93 *Phaedrus* 253c–d.

> bridling of the soul, saying: 'A mortal man with an intellect must bridle his soul in order,[94] so that/ it might not fall in with ill-fated earth, but be saved'.[95]
>
> For since the nature of all beings consists of opposite forces, it is needful to apply the opposing principles also to the soul, being diffused throughout all beings, for its rational part, that is, the mind, springs from the monad, whereas its passionate and appetitive parts spring from the dyad, that is, from matter, even if the Oracle hands down that the entire soul is a divine triad, for the aforesaid says 'Having mixed the spark[96] of the soul with two concording elements,/ intellect and divine will, to which he added a third,/ pure love, as a guide and holy bond of all beings.'[97]

The mixture in question is that which is at the origin of everything, namely of the soul as in the *Timaeus*:

> In between the being that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two. Similarly, he made a mixture of the same, and then one of the different, in between their indivisible and their corporeal, divisible counterparts. And he took the three mixtures and mixed them together to make a uniform mixture, forcing the different, which was hard to mix with being, and from the three had made a single mixture.[98]

This mixture, carried out in a mixing bowl (κρατήρ, see *Timaeus* 41d), involves the intelligible and the sensible in equal proportions. And it is also true for the bodies.[99]

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94 May be a reference to *Phaedrus* 246c.

95 *CO*, fr. 113 des Places: χρὴ δὲ χαλινῶσαι ψυχὴν βροτὸν ὄντα νοητόν,/ ὄφρα μὴ ἐγκύρσῃ χθονὶ δυσμόρῳ, ἀλλὰ σαωθῇ.

96 The soul; see Tardieu (1975). The original reference is probably Plato, *Resp*. X, 621b.

97 Ioannes Lydus, *De mensibus* I 11.1–19 (transl. A.C. Bandy). Citation of CO, fr. 44 des Places: … ψυχαῖον σπινθῆρα δυσὶν κράσας ὁμονοίαις,/ νῷ καὶ νεύματι θείῳ, ἐφ' οἷς τρίτον ἄγνὸν Ἔρωτα,/ συνδετικὸν πάντων ἐπιβήτορα σεμνόν, ἔθηκεν. There is a problem with νεύματι θείῳ. I follow hesitantly R. Majercik.

98 *Timaeus* 35a–b, transl. D.J. Zeyl.

99 See *supra*, Proclus, *In Tim*. I 210. 11–14 Diehl.

Prayer and Theurgy

Writing commentaries, teaching and learning are prayer, the first step of the return of the soul to its principle.[100] So, in the Neoplatonic school, the master is the high priest of a scientific religion proclaimed by Plato in the second part of the *Parmenides*, in accord with the Orphic and the Chaldaean theologies. Proclus when, in the beginning of his *Platonic Theology*, he writes to his addressee:

> An auditor therefore of the present work, as I have said, must not be ignorant of the *truth* contained in the phenomena, nor unacquainted with the paths of erudition,[101] and the disciplines which they contain; for through these we obtain a more immaterial knowledge of a divine essence. But all these must be bound together in the leader intellect.
>
> Being likewise a partaker of the dialectic of Plato, meditating those immaterial energies which are separate from corporeal powers, and desiring to contemplate by intelligence in conjunction with reason [true] beings, our auditor must genuinely apply himself to the interpretation of divine and blessed dogmas; and he will deploy the depths of his soul with the assistance of *love*, according to the *Oracle*,[102] since, as Plato somewhere[103] observes, for the apprehension of this theory a better assistant than *love* cannot be obtained.
>
> He must likewise be exercised in the *truth* which pervades all things, and must excite his intelligible eye to real and perfect truth. He must establish himself in a firm, immovable, and safe kind of divine knowledge, and must be *persuaded* not to admire anything else, nor even to direct his attention to other things, but must hasten to divine light with an intrepid reasoning energy, and with the power of an unwearied life; and in short, must *propose* to himself such a kind of energy and rest as becomes him to possess who intends to be such a coryphaeus as Socrates describes in the *Theaetetus*.[104]

100 See Brisson (2000).

101 Plato, *Timaeus* 28a.

102 Kroll (1922), 26, nothing in des Places. Saffrey and Westerink propose a revised text: ἔρωτι μὲν <τὰ> βάθη κατὰ τὸ Λόγιον ἀναπλώσας τῆς ψυχῆς.

103 Plato, *Symposium* 212b.

104 Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I 2, 11. 8–26 Saffrey-Westerink (transl. Th. Taylor modified). The reference is at Plato, *Theaetetus* 173c.

But prayer must be linked to theurgy. In the context of an interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, Proclus coincides with Iamblichus on the question of the relations between prayer and theurgy.

> It also appears to me that Plato sufficiently unfolds the three elevating causes, *love*, *truth*, and *faith*, to those who do not negligently read what he has written. For what besides *love* conjoins with *beauty*? Where is the plain of *truth*, except in this place? And what else than faith is the cause of this ineffable initiation? For initiation in short, is neither through intelligence nor judgment, but through the unical silence imparted by *faith*, which is better than every intellective operation, and which establishes both whole souls and ours, in the ineffable and unknown nature of the Gods.[105]

He establishes a parallelism between the triad of the *Phaedrus*, the Chaldaean triad and the triad constituted by amorous madness, philosophical divination, and theurgy, animated by faith:

> In short, there are these three things which replenish divine beings, and which are the sources of plenitude to all the superior genera of beings, that is goodness, wisdom and beauty. And again, there are three things which collect together the beings that are filled; they are secondary indeed to the former, but pervading to all the divine orders, and these are faith, truth and love. But all things are saved through these, and are conjoined to their primary causes; some things indeed, through the amorous madness, others through divine philosophy, and others through theurgic power, which is more excellent than all human wisdom, because it comprehends what is good in divination, the purifying powers of the ritual, and in short, all such things as are the effects of divine possession. Concerning these things, therefore, we may perhaps again speak more opportunely.[106]

For Proclus, as for Iamblichus, prayer is indeed an ascent of the soul toward its principle, which exhibits a soteriological character, but this ascent must be integrated within the practice of theurgy.

105 Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* IV 9, 31.6–16 Saffrey-Westerink (transl. Th. Taylor modified).

106 Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I 25, 112.25–113.10 Saffrey-Westerink (transl. Th. Taylor modified).

At the end of this long itinerary, we may give a coherent description of the theory of prayer among the Neoplatonists linked, since Porphyry, to the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Beginning with Iamblichus, prayer, conceived as the return of the soul to its principle, is associated with cult, and more specifically with theurgy.

The process must be situated within the structure of the Neoplatonic philosophical system: 1) All beings proceed from the gods, and ultimately from the One. 2) All beings remain among the gods. 3) All beings convert toward the gods. After the One-Good come the henads, which have two faces: one turned toward the One-Good, and the other toward the Intelligible. Three of these henads, the good, knowledge, and beauty, are the source of the three intelligible monads, faith, truth, and love. From these intelligible monads come faith, truth, and intellective love. At this level, Eros helps the demiurge mixing opposite elements together, fashioning the soul and inanimate bodies, and implanting passwords or symbols which enable the soul to rise back up to their source.

This is what prayer, which thus has a soteriological function, consists in. In this context, prayer is not a matter of supplication or vows, but a mean to ensure the soul's salvation.

Transl. by Michael Chase

Annex

Neoplatonic System	**Chaldaean Oracles**	**Orphic Rhapsodies**
Unutterable One		
1) One-Good	1) (...)	1) Chronos
2) Henads	2) [Good, Knowledge, Beautiful]	2) ?–
Intelligible-Intellect		
3) Intelligibles: Being [3 triads]	3) Paternal Abyss	3)
Being	Faith	Ether-Chaos-Egg
Life	Truth	Yellow-White-Eggshell
Intellect	Love leaping from the Father	Phanes-Metis-Eros

(cont.)

Neoplatonic System	Chaldaean Oracles	Orphic Rhapsodies
4) Intelligibles-intellective: Life [3 triads] Real Life Life as such Intellective Life	4) Intelligible et intellective triads Iynges: Faith Collectors: Truth Teletarchs: Love	4) Intelligible-intellective triads of gods three Nights, three parts of Ouranos three Hecatoncheirs
5) Intellectives: Intellect [7 members]	5) Intellective gods	5) Intellective gods
5.1) Triad of the parents: pure intellect living intellect intellective intellect (demiurge)	5.1) Three source parents Kronos: Faith Hecate: Truth Zeus: Love	5.1) Triad of the parents Kronos Rheia Zeus
5.2) Three immaculate gods	5.2) Three implacable gods	5.2) Three immaculate gods: Kourets
5.3) A separative monade	5.3) The diaphragm	5.3) Castration of Ouranos by Kronos
Soul-Hypostasis		
6) Hypercosmic gods Chief-gods: 4 triads: Demiurgic – Zeus, Poseidon, Hades Coric – Hecate, Soul, Virtue Apollonic – 3 Helios / 3 Corybantic Apollo – 3 Corybants	6) Hypercosmic gods Chiefs-intellective-chiefs: chief-gods divided intellectives: hyperarchic-gods psychic intellectives: archic-gods	6) Four triads of gods: Paternal – Zeus, Poseidon, Hades Coric – Artemis, Kore, Athena Apolloniach – 3 Helios / 3 Kouretic Apollo – 3 Kourets

Neoplatonic System	Chaldaean Oracles	Orphic Rhapsodies
7) Hypercosmic-encosmic gods: 4 triads (myth in the *Phaedrus*) Demiurgic triad – Zeus², Poseidon², Hephaistos Warden triad – Hestia, Athena², Ares Vivifying triad – Demeter², Hera², Artemis Salvatorial triad – Hermes, Aphrodite², Apollo²	7) Gods separated from the world: *ázo̲noi* psychic: archangelic psychic-corporal: detached	7) Hypercosmic-encosmic gods: 4 triads (myth in the *Phaedrus*) Demiurgic triad – Zeus², Poseidon², Hephaistos Warden triad – Hestia, Athena², Ares Vivifying triad – Demeter², Hera², Artemis Salvatorial triad – Hermes, Aphrodite², Apollo²
8) Encosmic gods	8) (…) corporal: *zo̲naîoi* Non-wandering gods (fixes stars) Wandering gods (planets) Sublunary gods	8) Encosmic gods ruled by Dionysos (circle of the Same) Dionysos mauled by the Titans (circle of the Different)
Souls		
9) Divine sublunary souls: Demons, Angels, Heroes	9) Divine sublunary souls: Archangels, Angels, Partners of the gods, Demons, Heroes	9) Intelligible or superior souls
10) Human souls	10) Human souls [Faith, Truth, Love, Hope]	10) Human souls
11) Bodies	11) Bodies	11) Bodies
12) Matter	12) Matter	12) Matter

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Cosmic Etiology and Demiurgic Mimesis in Proclus' Account of Prayer

Danielle A. Layne

> How gladly do I now welcome my release, Socrates, from my protracted discourse, even as a traveler who takes his rest after a long journey! And I make my prayer to that god who has recently been created by our speech (although in reality created of old), that he will grant to us the conservation of all our sayings that have been rightly said (…).
>
> PLATO, *Critias* 106a

⁂

Introduction

In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* Proclus discusses at length the value of prayer. Notably expanding on the defense and conceptions of his predecessors,[1]

1 See Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* (= *DM*) 5.26 where he fully defends the nature of prayer against Porphyry's doubts about its utility. See also Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* (= *In Tim.*), I 208.7–30 where Proclus discusses his forerunner's view of prayer. For the sake of focus, a discussion of Proclus' relationship to Iamblichus' views on prayer has been passed over in this essay. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the following hopes to show that Proclus' views on prayer are distinct from Iamblichus' and may even represent advancement. Their similarities are indeed striking and will be noted when relevant but it could certainly be argued that Proclus' five-fold account of prayer and his defense of prayer may represent an overt attempt to surpass and critique Iamblichus' account. As he writes himself in his commentary on the *Timaeus*: "[Iamblichus] teaches us about both the power and perfection of prayer, a doctrine that is marvelous and extraordinary and exceeding expectation. As for us, our approach will be to translate the passage to a level with which our readers are more familiar and more cognizant, making its meaning plain and giving the account of prayer that concords with Plato's views." (Proclus, *In Tim.* I 209.7–13, tr. Runia and Share). Here, it could be argued that Proclus intends to make some important distinctions that will clarify the nature of prayer within the Platonic tradition. Particularly, Proclus' approach appears to synthesize the practice of prayer with Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, a project that was also dear to Iamblichus but one that Proclus more concretely explicated. The latter's

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Proclus recognizes the explicit need to unify his account with the Platonic text, attempting at all times to harmonize his defense of the nature of prayer within Timaeus' own cosmological project. While analyzing the *being*, *activity* and *perfection* of prayer, Proclus readdresses the longstanding philosophical problematic of attempting to pay homage to a wholly transcendent god, i.e. the god of the philosophers, particularly a divinity that fails to operate as an efficient cause, or truly productive agent, of the cosmos. To be sure, Proclus primarily has Aristotle's self-thinking intellect in mind.[2] In fact, Proclus' theory of prayer implicitly leans on his criticism of Aristotle's etiology of the cosmos which, as far as the Neoplatonist believes, poorly mimics the etiology of Plato and is, on the whole, self-contradictory insofar as Aristotle's cause of the cosmos fails to act as an originative and creative principle that could secure the good of creation by looking to an intelligible paradigm. In sum, this god is not a god to whom one could legitimately and defensibly pray, as it is nothing more than an arbitrary object of love, not something that has merited this affection. Consequently, Proclus' theory of prayer rests on his critique of Aristotle's four causes, notably the impotence of Aristotle's final cause, and so Proclus further valorizes the role of the demiurge in the coming-into-being of the cosmos. Due to this it will become evident that the role of the demiurge, who creates by virtue of an internalization of the "invisible causes of the universe,"[3] plays an important role in Proclus' conception of the ascent of prayer as in prayer we become *like* the demiurge as far as possible. As we shall soon see, the individual soul must internalize and become one with both the *intellect* and *will* of this primary cause of the cosmos if it hopes to obtain the life of well-being. Proclus' theory of prayer will therein

project explicitly aims to defend prayer's value in discussing the coming-into-being of the cosmos while Iamblichus' account of prayer (which only survives in *DM*) intended to defend the nature of theurgy in general. For a very different translation of this passage see Dillon (1973, 407) who argued that the following account of prayer in Proclus' commentary is to be wholly identified with Iamblichus' views. For a discussion of how Proclus may be advancing a form of *philosophical prayer* in order to harmonize Iamblichus' views of prayer with Plotinus and Porphyry while further substantiating the theurgic nature of philosophy itself see Layne (2013). There it is argued that prayer has a substantial role in securing human freedom; throughout this particular essay many parallels to Iamblichus' conception of the nature of prayer and its similar relation to human freedom are drawn. For more information on the nature of prayer in Proclus, Iamblichus and the Platonic tradition see Dillon (1973), (2002) [= *supra*, pp. 7–25], (2012); Beierwaltes (1979); Van den Berg (2001); Addey, (2012, 133–150); and Corrigan (2012); Timotin (2014).

2 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b18–30; 1074b34–35.

3 *In Tim.* I 207.19.

enact a kind of cosmological and demiurgic mimesis that not only supports the Platonic doctrine of *homoiōsis theō*[4] but also elaborates the link between our good and the good of the All. In short, Proclus, like Timaeus, will clearly "link his object of study with an account of the studying subject",[5] revealing why a detailed discussion of prayer and the nature of the ascent of the human soul is intimately tied to the causes of the cosmos. As the Neoplatonist continues:

> [Timaeus] showed that he had kept an eye to this too, when he explicitly declares near the end, that whoever would obtain a life of well-being 'must liken that which tries to apprehend to what it is apprehending'. For the totality is always in a state of well-being, and our part too will be well-off when likened to the All. Moreover, in this way it will be returned to its cause. […] Whenever the earthly human-being is assimilated to the universe, he will also be imitating his own paradigm in the appropriate fashion, becoming orderly through his likeness to the cosmos, and well-off through his being modeled on a god who enjoys well-being.[6]
>
> tr. H. TARRANT [cf. *Timaeus* 90d]

Accordingly, then, the following project will first discuss Proclus' critique of Aristotle's causes, focusing therein on his conception of the final cause that fails to ensure both the intelligible nature of the cosmos but also its good. Second, it will analyze Proclus' conception of the demiurge, revealing how even the divine prays, at least in the Procline sense, by turning to its own superior causes in

4 See *Theaetetus* 175e–176b. For further references to the familiar Platonic concept of *homoiōsis theō* (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) see also *Laws* IV 687d–688b and 716b–d, *Republic* 613b1 and *Timaeus* 90d (= *Tim.*). This doctrine was the basis for almost all Platonic accounts of prayer, especially the Platonists of late antiquity like Porphyry and Iamblichus. See Layne (2013) and Addey (2012). In the following, it will be shown that while this is an important part of prayer it is only one of the five causes of true ascent and communion with the gods and furthermore only an ancillary cause. It is due to this that Proclus seems to be attempting to critique his predecessors.

5 *In Tim.* I 5.23–24. See also I 5.10–15, 202.26–28.

6 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 5.25–6.6: ὅτι δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἀπέβλεψεν, ἐδήλωσε πρὸς τῷ τέλει διαρρήδην εἰπών, ὅτι δεῖ τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἐξομοιῶσαι τὸν μέλλοντα τῆς εὐδαίμονος ζωῆς ἐπήβολον ἔσεσθαι· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὅλον ἀεὶ εὔδαιμον· ἔσται δὲ καὶ τὸ ἡμέτερον εὔδαιμον ὁμοιωθὲν τῷ παντί· καὶ γὰρ πρὸς τὴν αἰτίαν οὕτως ἀναχθήσεται· […] καὶ ὁ τῇδε ἄνθρωπος ἀφομοιῶται τῷ παντί, μιμήσεται καὶ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ παράδειγμα τὸν προσήκοντα τρόπον, κόσμιος γενόμενος διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν κόσμον ὁμοιότητα καὶ εὐδαίμων διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν εὐδαίμονα θεὸν ἀπεικασίαν.

order to guarantee the perfection of his creation.[7] We shall see here how we, in our prayers, imitate and thus become like the cosmos itself as well as its demiurgic cause.

The Primary versus Supplementary Causes of the Cosmos

In concord with the overall goal of his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Proclus spends a considerable amount of time attempting to synthesize the project of studying nature, i.e. physics, with the study of the divine and therein arguably collapses the pretense that there should exist a rigid distinction between theology and natural philosophy, between divinity and physics. While clarifying the object of the *Timaeus*, Proclus writes:

> [Timaeus'] theory will thus be the universe inasmuch as its existence derives from the gods. Now it is possible for someone to examine the universe in many different ways, either as a corporeal entity or inasmuch as it participates in soul both partial and whole, or inasmuch as it has intellect. Timaeus for his part examines the nature of the universe not only along these lines, but especially in terms of the procession from the Demiurge. In this respect philosophy is seen as a kind of theology, because entities that come into existence naturally, inasmuch as they are generated from the gods, also have a kind of divine existence.[8]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE, slightly adapted

As is evident, Timaeus' investigation will not merely describe nature as a physical entity, nor will it simply examine the cosmos's participation and possession of both soul and intellect. Rather, his account will underscore the causal responsibility of the demiurge in the coming-into-being of the living cosmos, which will result in the divinization of the cosmos as such. To be sure, in prominently emphasizing this demiurgic cause in his exegesis of Plato's text, Proclus orients his readers to compare this mythological, i.e. theological, account

7 See *In Tim.* I 206.27–207.24. This passage will be explicitly discussed below.

8 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 217.18–27: ἔσται οὖν αὐτῷ περὶ τοῦ παντὸς ἡ θεωρία, καθ' ὅσον ἀπὸ θεῶν παράγεται τὸ πᾶν ἐπεὶ καὶ πολλαχῶς ἄν τις τὸν κόσμον θεωρήσειεν, ἢ κατὰ τὸ σωματοειδές, ἢ καθ' ὅσον ψυχῶν μετέχει μερικῶν τε καὶ ὁλικῶν, ἢ καθ' ὅσον ἔννους ἐστίν. ἀλλ' ὅ γε Τίμαιος οὐ κατὰ τούτους μόνον τοὺς τρόπους ἐπισκέψεται τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν, ἀλλὰ διαφερόντως κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ πρόοδον· οὗ δὴ καὶ ἡ φυσιολογία φαίνεται θεολογία τις οὖσα [...]. See also *In Tim.* I 204.6.

of the cosmos with Aristotle's seemingly more sober reflections on nature in his *Physics*. Dismissing the Stagirite's claims to novelty, Proclus perfunctorily describes Aristotle as a mere emulator (ζηλώσας) of Plato "who falls short of the teachings of his master."[9]

Particularly, Proclus criticized the causative role of Aristotle's god as self-thinking thought or unmoved mover, which was not the productive cause of the cosmos but a final cause that entices the movement of things.[10] Said differently, in Proclus' estimation this is a god that can, as it were, lure things to itself, toward an end, but is never a god that acts as a beginning of any movement; this god only accomplishes all movement. Clearly, conceiving of the divine as that which fortuitously seduces things to move is a far cry from invoking an image of a god one would pray to insofar as Aristotle's divinity is only incidentally a cause of the cosmos having nothing to do with its coming-into-being or emergence as such. Aristotle's god is wholly transcendent, untouched by the messy work of creation. Overall, self-thinking intellect remains aloof and impassible and so, perhaps ironically, in Proclus' eyes it is Aristotle's conception of the divine, rather than Plato's, as one might expect, that results in a kind of transcendence unable to defend the legitimacy of human supplication and devotion to the gods.[11]

One of Proclus' most astute criticisms of Aristotle's divine cause centers upon the simple observation that without a demiurgic or creative/productive cause, whose very activity would be to instill in the cosmos its capacity for desire, the efficacy of a self-thinking intellect as even a final cause, however wondrous and beautiful it might be, would be impotent to stir the celestial bodies into a rotation. As Proclus questions:

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9 *In Tim.* I 7.14–18. See also Steel (2003) 176 n. 3. Furthermore, Steel's essay offers an excellent account of Proclus' critique of Aristotle's final cause. The following is indebted to this article. See also Steel (1987), 213–225.

10 See *In Tim.* I 266.21–268.24. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII 1072b3.

11 For Proclus' full critique of Aristotle's final cause as that which stimulates the movement of the cosmos see *In Tim.* I 266.21–268.22. As he notes, "The Peripatetics state that a separated entity exists, but that it is a final rather than efficient cause. For this reason they have both destroyed the paradigms and placed a non-multiple intellect at the head of the universe." The criticisms derive from the questions that follow: 1) Where does the cosmos obtain the desire to love the intellect? (see below) 2) From where does the cosmos obtain its unlimited motion? 3) Must the intellect deliberate when making the cosmos or does it happen through the fact of its existence alone and 4) Do not craftsmen have blueprints and if nature has no blueprints, is it not irrational?

> If the cosmos loves the Intellect, as Aristotle says, and it comes into motion in relation to the Intellect, where does it obtain this desire from? It is necessary, since the cosmos is not that which is first, that it obtain this desire from a cause which moves it towards love.[12]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

In other words, the cosmos needs a productive cause, a demiurge, which understands the good of instilling the cosmos with the capacity of attraction.[13] Otherwise even its desire for something like the self-thinking intellect would be wholly accidental, a product of chance tending toward hollow necessity, divine fatality, divine *fatum*.

Proclus further criticizes Aristotle not only for neglecting the value of the demiurgic, but also for failing to recognize the problems entailed in the dismissal of nature's need for a paradigm.[14] That is, in doing away with the forms, Aristotle all too casually rejected the value of a *paradigmatic* cause despite recognizing its need elsewhere in his programmatic. As Proclus writes:

> Furthermore, how do we observe craftsmen here in their creative task? Do they not have blueprints of their completed products? This is something that the splendid Aristotle too has conceded. But 'if art imitates nature', then much prior [than this] nature too must have blueprints of what comes into being through its agency.[15]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

In other words, without blueprints, i.e. a paradigm, nature would resemble Anaxagoras' Mind, a deus ex machina that lacks rhyme or reason because it would actually lack genuine agency.[16] Nature would ultimately be reduced to a blind force, a medium haphazardly pushing material things along the way,

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12 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 267.4–8: εἰ γὰρ ἐρᾷ ὁ κόσμος, ὥς φησι καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης, τοῦ νοῦ καὶ κινεῖται πρὸς αὐτόν, πόθεν ἔχει ταύτην τὴν ἔφεσιν; ἀνάγκη γάρ, ἐπεὶ μή ἐστι τὸ πρῶτον ὁ κόσμος, ἀπ' αἰτίας ἔχειν ταύτην τὴν ἔφεσιν αὐτὸν τῆς εἰς τὸ ἐρᾶν κινούσης·

13 Cf. *In Parm.* 788.13–29 and 842.25–37.

14 See Steel (2003), 179. See Martijn (2010) for an excellent account of the causative role of nature in Proclus' commentary.

15 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 268.16–20: ἔτι τοίνυν πῶς τοὺς ἐνταῦθα δημιουργοὺς ποιοῦντας ὁρῶμεν; οὐχὶ λόγους ἔχοντας τῶν ἀποτελεσμάτων; τοῦτο μὲν οὖν καὶ ὁ δαιμόνιος Ἀριστοτέλης συνεχώρησεν· εἰ δὲ ἡ τέχνη μιμεῖται τὴν φύσιν, δεῖ πολλῷ πρότερον καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν τῶν ὑπ' αὐτῆς γιγνομένων λόγους.

16 Cf. *In Tim.* I 9.25–12.26.

and thus nature would fail to be a principle at all. Describing the implications of the loss of the paradigmatic cause, Proclus denounces Aristotle's rejection of the forms in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, writing, "he who does not accept this theory has succeeded in abolishing at one sweep from the sphere of existence, along with the paradigms, the demiurgic cause also, and has rendered the final cause imperfect; for he makes it the end of motion, but not of the existence of all things."[17] Overall, Proclus argues that Aristotle has reduced the final cause to a vacant object of attraction and made nature and the cosmos have, at its origin, nothing more than spontaneity and chance. On this basis Proclus surmises that the Aristotelians ultimately "fail to notice that they make the cause a non-cause" insofar as they have unwittingly allowed chance to be the origin of all things.[18]

With an interesting twist of hermeneutical talent, Proclus has made Aristotle, rather than Plato, fail at properly articulating all the causes of the cosmos[19]

17 *In Parm*. 983.12–18. See also 794.1–25.

18 *In Tim*. I 262.5–9 and *In Tim*. I 356.31. As C. Steel (2003), 180 explicates, "In this respect the Aristotelians are no better than the followers of the Epicureans who let the whole world originate from chance. The Aristotelians, Proclus says, respect the principle of causality only by name, for since they also rank chance among the causes, they reduce the cause to something without cause." Cf. Syrianus, *in Met*. 1080a4–9, 120.15–31. As Syrianus writes: "[H]ow comes it that, whereas he grants that artificial objects are brought about in accordance with models and in their case he does not reject a paradigmatic cause, in the case of the works of nature, which are after all the object of imitation for the arts, he declares that they come about without a purpose, the creative activity of nature being referred back to no definite causative principle?" (tr. Dillon and O'Meara).

19 See *Metaphysics* 988a8–19. Steel (2003: 179) surmises the strangeness of the fact that Aristotle only concedes to Plato a formal and material cause. Steel connects this blatant oversight of Aristotle to Proclus' own eagerness to retell the history of the discovery of the primary causes of the cosmos. As he writes: "In this presentation of the development of natural philosophy Proclus clearly took his inspiration from the historical survey of Aristotle in *Metaphysics* A. Yet, he turns this scheme against Aristotle himself. Being convinced that he was the first to have clearly articulated the four types of causality (material, formal, efficient and final), Aristotle evaluated his predecessors to the extent that they had acceded to the knowledge of this fourfold causality. Thus he finds in Plato only two causes, the material and the formal. Scholars since Alexander of Aphrodisias always have expressed their surprise at this misrepresentation, for Aristotle certainly knew that Plato had introduced the demiurge as the efficient cause and taken the Idea of the Good as the ultimate (final) principle of explanation. It may seem that Proclus finds some pleasure in distorting in his turn the historical truth. In his view, it is Plato who represents the zenith in the gradual search for causes. After him begins the decadence and loss of the most profound insights. Compared to Plato's sublime views, Aristotle is

and thus, perhaps with a notable jab, Proclus opens his commentary by discussing Plato's supremacy in unpacking those principles which escaped Aristotle:

> For physical inquiry, to put it briefly, is divided into three, one part busying itself with matter and material causes, the next including investigation of the form too and revealing that this is more properly a cause, and the third part demonstrating *that these do not even have the role of cause* (rather they play the role of supplementary requirements), postulating that the 'causes' in the strict sense of natural occurrences are different: *the productive, the paradigmatic, and the final.*[20]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE, emphasis in italics my own

Attempting to argue that Plato not only foreshadowed Aristotle's system of causes but ironically surpassed it in advance, Proclus contends that there are six causes: 1) material, 2) formal, 3) instrumental, 4) efficient/productive, 5) paradigmatic and 6) final.[21] Dividing this list in two, however, Proclus claims

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only a mediocre thinker, for he only speaks of two subservient causes, matter and form. Whereas Aristotle criticized his predecessors for not having fully distinguished the causes, he is now censured in his turn for such a rudimentary simplification, having reduced the full system of causes discovered by Plato to only matter and form".

20 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 2.1–8: τῆς γὰρ δὴ φυσιολογίας τριχῆ διῃρημένης, ὡς συνελόντι φάναι, καὶ τῆς μὲν περὶ τὴν ὕλην ἀσχολουμένης καὶ τὰς ὑλικὰς αἰτίας, τῆς δὲ προστιθείσης καὶ τὴν τοῦ εἴδους ζήτησιν καὶ τοῦτο κυριώτερον αἴτιον ἀποφαινομένης, τῆς δ' αὖ τρίτης ταῦτα μὲν οὐδὲ τῶν αἰτίων λόγον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῶν συναιτίων ἔχειν ἀπο δεικνυούσης, τὰς δὲ κυρίως αἰτίας τῶν φύσει γινομένων ἄλλας ὑποτιθεμένης, τὸ ποιητικόν, τὸ παραδειγματικόν, τὸ τελικόν.

21 Cf. Seneca, *Epistle* 65, 4–16 who argued that there were five causes: "So there are five causes, as Plato says; that from which, that by which, that in which, that with reference to which, and that on account of which." See Galen, *On Antecedent Causes* 6.63–64 for an overt reference to the sixth cause, i.e. the instrumental cause which, in the Neoplatonic system, is often identified with nature as that *by which* the divine distributes the reasoning principles and activities of the cosmos. For more information on these causes in Neoplatonism and Proclus see Siovarnes (1996), 88–91, Gerson (2005), 101–130, Tarrant (2007), 50, 94–95n. 12, and Steel (2003), 181 and n. 19, 21 and 22. Proclus constantly refers to this schema of causes throughout his work but notable references include *In Tim.* I 12.21, 143.19–22, 263.20 and *in Alc.*, 168.21–169.2. Cf. Olympiodorus *in Gorg.*, Proem 5.1–6,1. Interestingly, the anonymous author of the *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 17, 33–39 clearly connects this system of causes to the causes of a Platonic dialogue, therein emphasizing the Neoplatonic value that Plato's work was a literary microcosm that could assist souls in their purification and ascent. See Coulter (1976), 95–103 for the groundbreaking history of identifying literature with a living thing or with a microcosm that resembles the macrocosm created by the

that matter, form and instrument are only *synaitia* or subservient, supplemental causes lacking the stature of being the primary causes that Plato clearly intended to invoke in the *Timaeus*, i.e. the demiurge, the paradigm and the Good.

> Plato alone follows [the tactics of] the Pythagoreans: his teaching includes the supplementary requirements of natural things, the receptacle and the enmattered form, that are subservient to what are strictly causes in the process of generation; but prior to this he investigates the primary causes: the one that creates, the paradigm, and the goal.[22]
>
> trs. TARRANT

The need to separate between the true causes and the merely ancillary causes like matter and form arose from Proclus' observation that these principles, while necessary for the product that is creation, are not sufficient causes insofar as they are immanent to the cosmos and thus lack self-sufficiency and are unable to function as independent, transcendent principles.[23] As Proclus writes elsewhere, matter and form are "truly other and belong to others rather than to themselves, and are contributory causes rather than true causes […]."[24]

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demiurge. See also Layne (2014). I am inclined to take a speculative leap here and identify the literary work which possesses within its being the causes of the cosmos with a type of Platonic prayer (or as P. Hadot would like, a spiritual exercise), insofar as true prayer, as we shall soon see, is also a microcosmic activity caused and perfected by the divine itself. See *In Tim.* I 213.8–19 (quoted below).

22 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 2.30–3.4: μόνος δὲ ὁ Πλάτων τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις ἑπομένως παραδίδωσι μὲν καὶ τὰ συναίτια τῶν φυσικῶν πραγμάτων, τὸ πανδεχὲς καὶ τὸ ἔνυλον εἶδος, δουλεύοντα τοῖς κυρίως αἰτίοις εἰς γένεσιν. πρὸ δὲ τούτων τὰς πρωτουργοὺς αἰτίας διερευνᾶται, τὸ ποιοῦν, τὸ παράδειγμα, τὸ τέλος […].

23 *Elements of Theology* (= *ET*), § 75. Proclus writes, "For if such a cause were immanent in its effect, either it would be a complementary part of the latter or it would in some way need it for its own existence, and it would in this regard be inferior to the effect. That which exists in the resultant is not so much a cause as a supplementary cause, being either a part of the thing produced or an instrument of the maker: for the several parts of the thing exist within it, but are less perfect than the whole; and the instrument serves the maker for the process of production, but is unable to determine for itself the limits of creation. Accordingly every cause properly so called, inasmuch as it both is more perfect than that which proceeds from it and itself furnishes the limit of its production, transcends the instruments, the elements, and in general all that is described as a supplementary cause." (tr. Dodds with slight modifications) See also Siovarnes (1996: 91) and Steel (2003: 178).

24 *In Parm.* 1059 and 982–983. Cf. Simplicius, *In Phys.* 3.16–19 and 316.22–26.

For Proclus the true causes, the efficient, the paradigmatic and the final, properly transcend their effects and as a consequence are assigned a more prominent role in his account of creation.

In a robust attempt to distinguish these causes in his account of the cosmos, Proclus describes them as "1) the demiurgic intellect, 2) the intelligible cause in which the All is pre-established and 3) the Good, which stands before the creator in the role of object of desire."[25] Following this he identifies the demiurgic intellect as that *from which* a thing is produced, while the intelligible cause is the paradigm *in view of which* the cosmos has been fashioned and, as is readily clear, the Good is that *for the sake of which* the cosmos has come-into-being.[26] To situate the three causes within late Neoplatonic ontology, the final cause is the One as supreme principle while the paradigmatic resides at the level of the intelligible in the hypostasis of Being. Finally, Proclus assigns the efficient cause, i.e. the demiurge, to the intellective sphere as he is that which contemplates, or looks to, the intelligible and is thus intellective (νοερός), which squares nicely with Plato's own classification of the demiurge as an intellect (νους).[27]

For Proclus the demiurge is the truly creative and productive agent of the cosmos and is thus the efficient cause of the cosmos who exists, contrary to Aristotle's image of the divine, as its "Maker and Father."[28] Nevertheless, in this identification Proclus is keenly aware that, as the *Timaeus* insists, the

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25 See *In Tim.* I 3.4–7 (tr. Tarrant).

26 *In Tim.* I 3.12–13: ἀφ' ὧν παρῆκται, πρὸς ἃ δεδημιούργηται παρὰ τοῦ πάντων πατρός, ὧν ἕνεκα γέγονεν. Cf. *In Tim.* I 357.12–23. See also Runia and Share (2007), 94 and n. 10.

27 See *Tim.* 29a3–6 and *In Tim.* I 310.9–311.14. Writing on this complicated scheme Opsomer (2005), 53 succinctly clarifies: "The main division of the Intelligible in the broad sense [II] is that between Being (or the Intelligibles *stricto sensu* [2]), Life (or the Intelligible-Intellective level [3]), and Intellect [4]. Proclus argues that the demiurge is an Intellect [4], more precisely the lowest term of the first Intellective triad. [...] The demiurge is the god that marks the border of the Intellective gods. He is filled with the power of the intelligible monads and the sources of life (the hypostases above Intellect, [2] and [3]); from him proceeds all demiurgic activity; he himself remains at the top of Olympos, while presiding over the lower demiurgic gods." For a full discussion of these issues see *In Tim.* I 299.13–319.21, 321.24–323.22. See further Opsomer's Appendix I (2005), 69 and (2001), 116–117. See also Runia and Share (2008), 22–25 who, following Opsomer neatly, summarize this placement of the demiurge in the introduction to their translation of Proclus' commentary.

28 See *In Tim.* I 313.5–316.20, 317.17–21. Proclus spends a lengthy amount of time attempting to unpack the attribution and meaning of Plato's identification of the demiurge with such terms.

demiurge is not solely responsible for the beauty and intelligibility of the cosmos. Rather he looks to the intelligible paradigm. Nevertheless, the demiurge does not look to and create merely by copying an external other but, as Proclus rather poetically expresses it, the demiurge (who is often identified with Zeus),[29] like Kronos before him, ingests the "intelligible god," and takes the forms in through an act of "intuitive thinking."[30] Due to this, the demiurgic cause and paradigmatic cause are paradoxically unified as the demiurge "by thinking [the paradigm's] contents, becomes all things and gives existence to the sense-perceptible cosmos."[31] In other words, the demiurge metaphorically looks to that which is ontologically prior to and distinct from himself but, insofar as he internalizes the paradigm, his "looking" is not an outward gaze that sees only images of Being, i.e. perceives Being versus intuitively knowing it.[32] By contrast, the object of "intellection will be in him as well"[33] and thus the demiurge, despite being an intellective god, contemplates and becomes unified to an "Intelligible cosmos inasmuch as possible in the Intellective realm."[34] In short, while distinct from the paradigmatic cause (i.e. the paradigm transcends the demiurge), the demiurgic intellect is unified with the paradigm in a process that, as we shall shortly discuss, mirrors the Neoplatonic ascent of the soul to higher realities. In other words, the demiurge, like the individual

29 *In Tim.* I 313.5, 319.5 and *PT* V 22.79–80. See Opsomer (2001) for a concise discussion of this attribution of Proclus based upon Orphic mythology.

30 See *In Tim.* I 324.20 where Proclus once again makes the Orphic parallel to this Platonic image of the demiurge's relationship to the paradigm. He writes: "These matters were also revealed by Orpheus, when he said that the intelligible god was swallowed up by the Demiurge of the universe. Plato supposed that the Demiurge looks toward the Paradigm, indicating an act of intuitive thinking through [the metaphor] of sight, but the Theologian supposed that he leaped as it were on the Intelligible and swallowed it, as the myth stated." (trs. Runia and Share). See further *In Tim.* I 323.15–23 and, for another specific reference to ingesting the god, *In Tim.* I 206.26–207.21 (discussed below). Cf. *In Parm.* 800.1–801.10. Here, Proclus quotes the Orphic fragment 167b claiming that after Zeus swallowed Phanes "all came into being as a unity 'mixed together in the belly of Zeus.'" He further recalls the Chaldean Oracles (fr. 37) in order to insist on the value of the demiurgic cause as the paternal source from which the Ideas spring, therein constituting the intelligibility of the cosmos itself.

31 *In Tim.* I 325.5–6.

32 *In Tim.* I 323.18. As Runia and Share note this objection can be found in Plotinus, *Enn.* III 9 [13] 18.

33 *In Tim.* I 323.20.

34 See *In Tim.* I 324.29–30. Cf. 431.14–433.11 where Proclus details the relationship between the paradigm and the demiurge. See also *ET* § 103.

human soul, must discover or revert to the superior cause which, as it were, constitutes his very identity and being as the "Maker and Father" of the cosmos.[35]

Moreover, the demiurgic cause not only internally embraces the paradigmatic cause but also the final cause, i.e. the Good, insofar as the demiurge is in fact good.[36] It is due to the Good and its unification with the demiurge that the demiurgic cause becomes what he is, i.e. a god[37] who further wills the good and the corresponding production of the cosmos.[38] For Proclus, without the unification of the demiurgic cause with the final cause the demiurge would be, as Aristotle's god was similarly conceived, only an intellect that would not necessarily safeguard the creative providence or good of all things. As Proclus describes in distinguishing the intellect from the goodness of the demiurge:

> For it is the nature of intellect *qua* intellect to apprehend things and to know them, but to exercise providence is clearly divine. And so the demiurgic intellect has the property of being demiurgic on account of the goodness in him. For it is on account of this that the intellect in him is a producer of being and not merely able to know it and that the paradigm that is in him is active and produces just by being and is not merely perfective of intellect. And intellect, while it produces, receives

35 It could also be noted that just as the individual human soul that does not transcend the level of soul, the demiurge in thinking the paradigm does not become an intelligible cause but rather the paradigm simply exists as both intelligible, i.e. it remains in itself, and intellective insofar as it also exists in the demiurgic mind. Cf. *In Parm.* 795.1–5.

36 To be clear, the demiurgic goodness is distinct from the absolute Good itself. For Proclus, just as the paradigm is twofold insofar as it exists in-itself and within the Demiurgic intellect, so too the demiurge is a good and thus the final cause is "both absolute Goodness and demiurgic goodness." *In Tim.* I 360.15–20. See also *PT* V 16.59.

37 *In Tim.* I 361.4–20. Insofar as the demiurge is a god he is characterized by the triad of Goodness, Will and Providence. As Van den Berg (2001), 201 succinctly summarizes Proclus' account "[The demiurge] is good (ἡ ἀγαθότης), therefore he wants his creation to be good (ἡ βούλησις), hence he takes care that it is so (ἡ πρόνοια)." Cf. *PT* V 17.60–61. It will bode well for the reader if she recalls that for Proclus providence or *pronoia* "signifies the activity before the intellect, which must be attributed solely to the Good," and is to be distinguished from fate or *heimarmenê* that "indicates the cause that strings together" divided objects dissociated in space and time. For Proclus such things are consequently "moved by another and thus corporeal." See *De providentia et fato et eo quod in nobis ad Theodorum mechanicum* (= *de Prov.*), 5–14.

38 *In Tim.* I 370.13–372.19.

> power from both: from the Paradigm because it produces with reference to it, from Goodness because it is thanks to it that it creates.[39]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

It is thus due to the good of the demiurge that the demiurge is demiurgic, i.e. that he is not simply an intellect but a creative cause that not only creates but creates in such a way that he too through his own will "wanted all things to come into being as much like himself as possible."[40] In other words, the final cause ensures not only the good of the demiurge but also the good of his creations insofar as the demiurge is a good that wills that his effect, i.e. creation, can return and be like its cause. Here, Proclus is invoking the Neoplatonic doctrine of procession and reversion, emphasizing that it is ultimately due to the demiurgic goodness and his unity with the One that "his providence causes all things to revert right back to the One itself."[41] In other words, it is due to demiurgic providence, what Proclus describes as his suspension from the Good itself, that the cosmos participates with the Good insofar as "all things are made to revert upon the First […]."[42] As we shall soon see, it will be by this process of reversion and unification with providence that the individual human soul will aspire toward what it already truly wills or wants, i.e. the good, insofar as all things aspire to the good, a providential gift of the divine demiurge who so willed that the cosmos be like himself.[43]

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39 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 361.9–17: νοῦς μὲν γὰρ καθὸ νοῦς νοεῖν τὰ ὄντα πέφυκε καὶ γιγνώσκειν, τὸ δὲ δὴ προνοεῖν θεῖόν ἐστιν· ὥστε καὶ ὁ δημιουργικὸς νοῦς τὸ εἶναι δημιουργικὸς ἔχει διὰ τὴν ἀγαθότητα τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ. διὰ ταύτην γὰρ καὶ ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ νοῦς ποιητής ἐστι καὶ οὐ μόνον γνωστικὸς τοῦ ὄντος, καὶ τὸ ὂν τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ παράδειγμα δραστήριον καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ποιοῦν καὶ οὐχὶ τοῦ νοῦ μόνον τελειωτικόν. καὶ ὁ μὲν νοῦς ποιῶν ἀπ' ἀμφοῖν δυναμοῦται· καὶ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ παραδείγματος, διότι πρὸς αὐτὸ ποιεῖ, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγαθότητος. Cf. *PT* V 16. 59.

40 See *Tim.* 29e2–3 and *In Tim.* I 365.6–366.2.

41 *In Tim.* I 414.29–30.

42 *In Tim.* I 415.14.

43 On the identity of providence with the demiurge see *In Tim.* I 414.26–415.26 where Proclus writes, "And this is what providence truly is: the communication of good to all things and the reversion of all things towards the communicator and their participation [in it], [the communicator] giving what it gives to one and all according to the capacity of each for the gift. And we must bear in mind what [Plutarch] of Chaeronea said about the name providence on the basis that Plato so named the divine cause, and if the demiurge is both intellect and to the extent that he has [within him] something superior even to intellect, providence, he has quite properly received the latter name too on account of [his engaging in an] activity on a higher level than intellect." (tr. Runia and Share).

So, to summarize this preliminary survey of Proclus' causes, the demiurge internalizes the two other primary causes, the paradigmatic and final cause, thus establishing both their transcendence and immanence, i.e. the intelligible paradigm and the Good are both separate from but also intimate to the demiurge insofar as these causes remain in themselves but are also established from within the demiurge's own being as intellective and providential. Due to this the demiurge thinks and wills himself[44] and thus creates the divinely graced and enthused cosmos. So contrary to Aristotle's conception, the cause of the cosmos has active agency that is more than simply a final cause attracting things to itself, but rather it is an efficient cause that establishes an indissoluble bond of likeness from the heights of reality, the ineffable first principle, to the lowest depths of matter via making his creation like himself.[45] In this way the perfection and divinization, i.e. the good, of its creation is ensured.

Cosmological and Demiurgic Mimesis

Focusing now on how Proclus invokes this conception of the causes of the cosmos in his account of prayer, we should first note that Proclus opens his account of prayer by identifying Timaeus' prayers with the initial activity of the demiurge who, as Proclus casually narrates, similarly prays before his creative task. While utilizing Orphic mythology the Neoplatonist offers his readers their first glimpse of his conception of prayer that, conspicuously, emphasizes the demiurge's internalization of the primary causes. It will be worth quoting at length.

> But before dealing with the subject matter in its entirety, [Timaeus] turns his attention to invocations of the gods and prayers, imitating the Maker of the universe, who before undertaking the entire creative task is said to enter the oracular shrine of Night to fill himself with divine thoughts from there, to receive the principles of the creative task [...]. As for Kronos, after putting him in chains, he all but prays to him and says, "Raise up our race, glorious divine spirit," and throughout what follows he keeps on invoking the goodwill of his father. For how else would he be in a position to fill

44 On the demiurgic will and its relation to the providential nature of creation, see *In Tim.* I 370.13–372.19 and *PT* V 17.

45 See *In Tim.* I 209.21–26.

> all things with gods and make the sense-perceptible realm resemble the Living-Thing-itself unless he stretches out towards the invisible causes of the universe and himself filled with these is in a position to 'Bring forth from his heart wondrous deeds?'[46]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE, slight adaptation [cf. *Orph.* 155 and 1.2 Kern]

In this passage attention should be paid to Proclus' immediate identification of Timaeus with one who imitates "the Maker of the universe" insofar as the Pythagorean, like the maker, invokes and prays to his superiors—in the case of the demiurge, his own mother and father. In this we should note the novelty of Proclus' conception of a god that prostrates himself before another prior to performing the work that would establish him as the father of creation. Strikingly, unlike the self-thinking intellect of Aristotle, Proclus' demiurge recognizes the need for something other than himself, that is, he does not myopically think of only himself, but rather he is a creator who prays, who enters into the shrine of his superior cause. As such the demiurge is filled with divine thoughts that instigate or guide his entire creative task. It is through this divine supplication or turning to his mother (Night) and father (Kronos), that the demiurge ultimately becomes what he is, i.e. an efficient cause that 1) looks to a paradigm and 2) invokes, as Proclus describes, "the goodwill of his father."

The importance of this divine paradigm for prayer becomes more acute in Proclus' full defense of prayer that markedly begins with an invocation of the Neoplatonic doctrine of cyclical creativity that culminates in a highly suggestive passage on the presence of the divine in all things.

> For this reason, even if you take the lowest levels [of reality] there too you will find the divine present. The One is in fact everywhere present, inasmuch as each of the beings derives its existence from the gods, and even though they proceed forth from the gods, they have not gone out

46 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 206.26–207.20: πρὶν δὲ ἅψηται τῆς ὅλης πραγματείας, ἐπὶ θεῶν παρακλήσεις καὶ εὐχὰς τρέπεται, μιμούμενος καὶ ταύτῃ τὸν τοῦ παντὸς ποιητήν, ὃς πρὸ τῆς ὅλης δημιουργίας εἷς τε τὸ χρηστήριον εἰσιέναι λέγεται τῆς Νυκτὸς κἀκεῖθεν πληροῦσθαι τῶν θείων νοήσεων καὶ τὰς τῆς δημιουργίας ἀρχὰς ὑποδέχεσθαι καὶ τὰς ἀπορίας ἁπάσας, εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, διαλύειν καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸν πατέρα παρακαλεῖν εἰς τὴν τῆς δημιουργίας σύλληψιν. […] πρὸς δὲ τὸν Κρόνον πάλιν μετὰ τοὺς δεσμοὺς μόνον οὐκ εὐχόμενός φησιν ὄρθου δ' ἡμετέρην γενεήν, ἀριδείκετε δαῖμον; καὶ διὰ πάντων τῶν ἐχομένων τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς εὐμένειαν προκαλούμενος. καὶ πῶς γὰρ ἄλλως ἔμελλε θεῶν πάντα πληρώσειν καὶ πρὸς τὸ αὐτοζῷον ἀφομοιώσειν τὸ αἰσθητὸν ἢ πρὸς τὰς ἀφανεῖς αἰτίας τῶν ὅλων ἀνατεινόμενος, ἀφ' ὧν αὐτὸς πεπληρωμένος ἔμελλεν ἀπὸ κραδίης προφέρειν πάλι θέσκελα ἔργα;

> from them but rather are rooted in them. Where, indeed, could they 'go out', when the gods have embraced all things and taken hold of them in advance and still retain them in themselves?[47]
>
> tr. RUNIA and SHARE

Here, as most are immediately aware, we have a classic example of Proclus' own adherence to the doctrine of cyclical creativity where all effects of a cause remain (μονή), proceed from (πρόοδος) and, most importantly for understanding his conception of prayer, return (ἐπιστροφή) or revert upon their cause.[48] Insofar as all effects remain in their superior and productive causes, everything from the highest intelligible realities to the lowest depths of matter have, as Proclus' predecessor Iamblichus similarly insisted in *De Myst.*, their existence and foundation in the gods.[49] For Proclus (and Iamblichus) it is this causal chain of remaining and procession which establishes the link or bond between the divine and the human soul, without which the ascent of the soul would prove futile as there would be no common bond of likeness allowing for communion. As he explains in his *Elements of Theology*, "All reversion is accomplished through a likeness of the reverting terms to the goal of reversion"[50] and so Proclus emphasizes that the human soul possesses, once purified from 'outward leaning' activities, the possibility to ascend or return (ἐπιστροφή) to the divine in becoming like the divine because "like loves being connected to like."[51] This is the tie of divine *philia* running through all things, which establishes the coherence of Proclus' commitment to human

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47 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 209.21–26: διό, κἂν τὰ ἔσχατα λάβῃς, καὶ τούτοις παρὸν τὸ θεῖον εὑρήσεις· ἔστι γὰρ πανταχοῦ τὸ ἕν, καθὸ τῶν ὄντων ἕκαστον ἐκ θεῶν ὑφέστηκε, προελθόντα δὲ πάντα ἐκ θεῶν οὐκ ἐξελήλυθεν ἀπ' αὐτῶν, ἀλλ' ἐνερρίζωται ἐν αὐτοῖς· ποῦ γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἐξέλθοι, πάντα τῶν θεῶν περιειληφότων καὶ προκατειληφότων καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐχόντων;

48 See *ET* § 30 and § 35. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* V 2.1 and VI 5–7. See too Van den Berg (2001), 19–21 who also concisely explains Proclus' circular theory of causation in its association with the making and singing of hymns.

49 Cf. *DM* I.8, I.9. See also Shaw (1995), 133–135 and Addey (2012), 138.

50 *ET* § 32.

51 *In Tim.* I 208.8. Here Proclus is quoting from Porphyry who fully shared this understanding of the relationship between becoming like the divine and worship. See *De Abst.* II 34, 2–4 where Porphyry characterizes prayer and sacrifice as this ascent of the human soul in becoming like the divine. That is, the true sacrifice is the sacrifice of our mortal coil for the sake of becoming something other: "We must, then, be joined with and made like him, and must offer our own uplifting (*anagōgē*) as a holy sacrifice to god for it is both our hymn and our salvation." (tr. Clark).

communion with the divine and his belief that "the divine does not stand aloof from anything, but is present for all things alike."[52]

To be sure that the divine is present to all things even at the cosmic level, i.e. that the good does not stop at the coming-into-being of the physical cosmos,[53] but is present even at the lowest levels of reality is not, as Proclus attributes to Aristotle's account, the result of fortune. Rather, as we have seen, it is through the demiurgic cause and its own rootedness, reversion to and embrace of that which is ontologically prior, that his production becomes "an intelligent and ensouled god"[54] which resembles its creator and therein possesses this possibility of reverting or returning to the gods. For our purposes, it is entirely noteworthy that this entire process is identified with prayer in both the sensible and intelligible levels of existence. Put otherwise, Proclus has explicitly linked the similarity of the divine with the human through the activity of prayer, i.e. the very activity of reversion to one's superior and proximate causes. Furthermore, as the demiurge is actualized as the demiurge only through such prayer, all created things must similarly pray, reverting and receiving their very identity and being in this humble act of supplication. Overall, in this account of prayer, Proclus evidences how and why "all things pray except the First"[55] as for Proclus the totality of being prays from the sunflower to the human soul to the demi-

52 *In Tim.* I 209.20. This doctrine of divine *philia* was of the utmost importance for Iamblichus in his defense of theurgy insofar as it is not due to human manipulation or any kind of force that we can come into contact with the divine. Cf. *In Tim.* I 211.3. See Van den Berg (2001) 87 where he notes the parallel between Iamblichus and Proclus on the fact that prayers were not meant to force the gods as the "gods conferred their blessing on the theurgist because of the ties of *philia* between the gods and their creatures. They did so in accordance with their own will. Moreover, they did so without envy. Like Iamblichus, Proclus says that prayer creates persuasion of the divine, i.e. the opposite of force. The persuasion too originates from Iamblichus who states that prayer awakens persuasion, communion and indissoluble friendship." Cf. 72–74. See *DM* I, 12 for Iamblichus' attempt to respond to Porphyry's objections that prayer and theurgy were attempts to force the gods to an unbefitting ontological level. Iamblichus clarifies that the gods, as gracious and propitious, illuminate us and call souls upward in prayer as opposed to the gods themselves descending or being compelled to debase themselves for us. Van den Berg references further Zintzen (1983), and Nasemann (1991), 123–128 for more information on theurgy as divine persuasion. See also Addey (2012), for Iamblichus and divine sympathy.

53 *In Tim.* I 372.19–373.21.

54 *In Tim.* I 4.5.

55 *In Tim.* I 213.2 where Proclus quotes Theodore of Asine, fellow Neoplatonist and student of Porphyry, who said "all things pray except the first." See Runia and Share (2008), 49 n. 46.

urge itself.[56] Prayer then is no longer simply a mere activity of supplication but is part and parcel of the very perfection and being of the cosmos. To pray is to look inward and to revert to the invisible causes of the cosmos, i.e. the demiurge, the paradigm and the Good, which always already marks our own souls as its perfective activity.

> This is the supreme limit of true prayer, enabling it to link together reversion with the [initial] rest, to re-establish in the unity of the gods all that proceeded from it, and to enclose the light in us with the light of the gods. It is no small contribution, then, that prayer makes to the entire ascent of souls. Nor is it the case that the person who possesses virtue does not need the goods that come additionally through prayer, but rather the complete opposite. It is through prayer that the ascent is brought to completion and it is with prayer that the crown of virtue is attained, namely piety towards the gods.[57]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

Those who pray are virtuous because prayer allows them to commune and return to the divine origin, thus completing the activity and intent of the divine.[58] In Aristotelian terms, prayer is the activity (*energeia*) that allows the

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56 This is, of course, reminiscent of a now famous quote in a fragmentary work of Proclus (*De Sacrificio* 148, 14–18) which is largely based on justifying hieratic arts: "All things pray [...] either noerically or discursively or physically or perceptibly. The sunflower too moves to the extent that it is free to move, and in its rotation, if we could hear the sound of the air buffeted by its movement, we should be aware that it is a hymn to its king, such as it is within the power of a plant to sing." See Bidez (1928), 148–151. This translation is modified from Van den Berg (2001), 20.

57 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 211.29–212.5: καὶ τοῦτο πέρας ἐστὶ τὸ ἄριστον τῆς ἀληθινῆς εὐχῆς, ἵνα ἐπισυνάψῃ τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν τῇ μονῇ καὶ πᾶν τὸ προελθὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ τῶν θεῶν ἑνὸς αὖθις ἐνιδρύσῃ τῷ ἑνὶ καὶ τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν φῶς τῷ τῶν θεῶν φωτὶ περιλάβῃ. οὐκ ἄρα σμικρόν τι μόριόν ἐστιν ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς ὅλης ἀνόδου τῶν ψυχῶν, οὐδὲ ὁ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔχων ἀπροσδεής ἐστι τῶν ἀγαθῶν τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς εὐχῆς προσγινομένων ἀλλὰ πᾶν τοὐναντίον ἡ ἄνοδος δι' αὐτῆς ἐπιτελεῖται καὶ μετὰ ταύτης καὶ τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ περὶ θεούς ἐστιν ὁσιότης.

58 As Neoplatonic commentator W. Beierwaltes (1979), 314 argued, "The religious character of the act of transcendence arises particularly in the meaning that prayer has for the beginning and accomplishment of the pensive ascent to the One. This is, however, not an incidental addition of the introversion and transcendence of thinking, but it is internally its essence itself." Beierwaltes' exegesis on Proclus' conception of prayer has been immensely helpful in unpacking the metaphysical and soteriological implications of prayer.

human soul to actualize its *entelecheia*.[59] The virtuous person heeds the goods of prayer because they are not external goods appended to the soul but are the goods constitutive of the true work of the soul.[60] Furthermore, in prayer the cosmic cycle of creation has been brought to completion as it is the return of the originated to its divine origin so that the well-being of the individual and the All are brought into harmony with the demiurgic intellect and good.

To be sure, Proclus further corroborates this cosmic account of prayer, when he discusses the causes of prayer, emphasizing its material, formal, efficient, paradigmatic and final causes. For Proclus the material causes of prayer or our return are the demiurgic traces of itself in all things, i.e. the divine symbols or *sunthēmata*. Neatly described as a kind of divine signature that evidences our divine lineage and heritage, Proclus suggests that these symbols established not only in things but also within our own souls ultimately remind us and even beckon us to return to our origin.[61] We read:

> These [signatures] the Demiurge too had much earlier effectuated in the case of the souls, giving them signatures so that they could both remain [in their cause] and revert, on the one hand establishing them in accordance with the One, on the other hand graciously bestowing on them the [ability to] revert in accordance with Intellect.[62]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

According to Proclus, due to the god's benevolence, i.e. causal agency, these divine signatures (identified with marks that establish the soul's ability to revert to the intellect and to remain in the One) are sown into the human soul as

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59 *In Tim.* I 212.30–213.8.

60 Cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* I 212.7–13 where he writes, "In short none other should pray but the person who is especially good, as the Athenian stranger says: for this person the [practice of] conversing with the gods becomes highly effective for obtaining the life of well-being, whereas in the case of the wicked it is natural for the opposite to occur, 'for it is not permissible for the impure to come in contact with what is pure'." (tr. Runia and Share) Cf. *Laws* 716d–e2 and *Phd.* 67b2.

61 Cf. *In Tim.* I 270.11–16 and *PT* IV 29. Proclus is, of course, following Iamblichus' use of divine συνθήματα in theurgy. See *DM*, 2.11, 3.15. See also Addey (2012), 136–138, especially 136 n. 12, Van den Berg (2001), 74, Beierwaltes (1979), 317 and Shaw (1995), 48–50 and 162–228 for a discussion of the various different types of *sunthēmata* and *symbola*, and their role in the ascent of the soul in Iamblichus and Proclus.

62 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 210.20–30: ταῦτ' οὖν πολλῷ πρότερον καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς περὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐνήργησε τοῦ τε μένειν αὐταῖς καὶ τοῦ ἐπιστρέφειν συνθήματα δοὺς καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸ ἓν ἱδρύσας αὐτάς, κατὰ δὲ τὸν νοῦν τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν αὐταῖς καταχαρισάμενος.

the *material* causes of prayer, ultimately allowing souls to recognize that they are already bound to the god, embraced, as Iamblichus had also insisted, by divine *sympatheia* and *philia*. In recognizing these material causes of prayer we uncover the bond that establishes our ability to revert to and return to the divine.

Intriguingly, prayer's *formal* cause resides in the very structure of the divinely created soul in its capacity "to resemble the gods and bring their entire life to completion."[63] That is, the *formal* cause of prayer relies on the Platonic doctrine of *homoiōsis theō* or, as discussed above, the soul's ability to become like the divine in purifying itself from its mortal and sensible bonds, revealing therein the true form of the soul. Thus the *formal* cause of prayer is the divinely created and arranged soul itself, the perfectly ordered product of divine work that resembles its maker in possessing the ontological structure to become like its cause(s). Without this form that ultimately establishes the possibility of *familiarization* (οἰκείωσις) and assimilation to the divine, prayer would indeed lack the bridge that would straddle the gulf between the transcendent causes of creation and its finite effects. Proclus thus insists, along with his fellow Neoplatonists, that the ascent of the soul and prayer are due to the fact that the soul has the capacity to become like a god as far as possible, to identify and become one with the immortal element of the soul, in the act of true and proper prayer.

Markedly, we should further recognize that these two causes of prayer, i.e. the *material* and the *formal*, while of certain value for defending the Neoplatonic conception of prayer, neither establish concretely the efficacy of prayer nor reveal how it inspires the soul actually to pray. In other words, Proclus, in his account of prayer, has overtly attempted to show how the causes of prayer mirror the causes of creation; the *material* and *formal* cause of prayer are not the causes which truly establish the effect of praying but merely reveal how prayer is accomplished. The *material* and *formal* causes of prayer, as they are in reality, are simply ancillary causes, the *means* through which prayer is enacted as opposed to stimulated, i.e. the *sunaitia* of prayer.[64] These, in the end, are the

63 *In Tim.* I 213.15.

64 Proclus' overt identification of *all* the causes of prayer, I believe, is the advancement he was attempting to make in his discussion of prayer over Iamblichus. In fact, it is tempting to argue that Proclus' five-fold ascent of prayer mirrors this discussion of the five causes of the cosmos more than it mirrors Iamblichus' three-fold level of prayer [1) συναγωγόν, 2) συνδετικόν and 3) ἕνωσις]. In other words, Proclus' account, which is not simply an expansion of Iamblichus' account of prayer, seems to follow the ascent of the soul through contact or communion with the various causes of the cosmos. For example, Proclus'

immanent causes of prayer that are intimately tied to the soul as opposed to the divine. Consequently, Proclus recognizes the need to establish the transcendent agency of the divine that would therein vindicate and ultimately sanctify the perfection of the activity insofar as it too must have a cause that is greater than the effect, i.e. the soul's prayers must have a divine rather than human origin. Elucidating the nature of the primary causes of prayer, Proclus writes:

> As for the causes of prayer, we reckon them as follows. Its *efficient* causes are the efficacious powers of the gods, which turn around and summon all things towards the gods themselves. Its *final* causes are the undefiled goods which the souls enjoy when they are established in the gods. Its *paradigmatic* causes are the primary creative principles of reality, which both have proceeded from the Good and have been unified with it in a single ineffable union.[65]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE

first step of prayer as 1) *knowledge* of the gods (γνῶσις τῶν θείων) can be easily identified with an understanding of the material causes of prayer since such knowledge is further described as a recognition of the symbols of the divine in all things. Furthermore, Proclus' second level of prayer or 2) *familiarization* (οἰκείωσις) is only possible on the basis of the form of the soul or the formal cause of prayer. Third, what Proclus describes as a 3) *touching* or contact (συναφή) of the divine is a contact with the *demiurgic* cause. Later during his discussion of the ascent of the soul to the demiurge (*In Tim.* I 302.1), he overtly describes the initial contact with the divine (after familiarization) as a standing outside of the gate of the father. The fourth level or the 4) *approaching* (ἐμπέλασις), a rare term in Proclus, is also identified with possession of the light of the divine (τῶν θεῶν φωτός). Due to this corresponding description associated with illumination, one may easily see the relevance of Proclus' constant use of light imagery with the soul's illumination of its intellect or that which results from the *paradigmatic* cause. In the demiurge this was the intelligible paradigm itself while for us the light results from the activity of engaging with and projecting the image of the forms in the soul, i.e. the essential reasoning principles. Finally, there is a fifth and final level of prayer, 5) *unification* (ἕνωσις), which can easily be reconciled with the final cause, insofar as it is through this cause that all identity is presupposed and the soul reaches its highest level of ascent. See *In Tim.* I 211.9–25 for these five levels of prayer. For various discussions of these five levels of prayer see Dillon (1973), (2002) [= *supra*, pp. 7–25], (2012); Beierwaltes (1979); Van den Berg (2001); Addey (2012), 133–150); Corrigan (2012); and Layne (2013).

65 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 213.8–14: αἰτίας δὲ τῆς εὐχῆς ὡς μὲν ποιητικὰς ἀπολογιζόμεθα εἶναι τὰς δραστηρίους τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις, τὰς ἐπιστρεφούσας καὶ ἀνακαλουμένας πάντα ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς θεούς, ὡς δὲ τελικὰς τὰ ἄχραντα ἀγαθὰ τῶν ψυχῶν, ἃ δὴ καρποῦνται ἐνιδρυνθεῖσαι τοῖς θεοῖς, ὡς δὲ παραδειγματικὰς τὰ πρωτουργὰ αἴτια τῶν ὄντων, ἃ καὶ προῆλθεν ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἥνωται πρὸς αὐτὸ κατὰ μίαν ἄρρητον ἕνωσιν [...].

Here Proclus clearly describes the *efficient* cause of prayer as the active power of the gods and thus the Neoplatonist clearly advances the idea that prayer is not something that the individual soul can stimulate or bring into motion. Rather, like the cosmos which does not originally move itself but is moved or brought into being by the demiurge, so too prayer has its origin in the divine, in the superior causes. Prayer is stimulated not by the individual but by the goodness of the divine, causing an attraction of all things to themselves. In tune with this, the *final* cause of prayer is overtly identified in the return or embrace of the soul with the true causes of all things as through this unification the soul shares in the goods or perfections of the divine, e.g. self-sufficiency and true identity. Here, the soul, in having turned from that which made it a slave, the body, can now share in the life of the divine and enjoy goods which are far from petty material things or the satisfaction of individual desires. Rather the goods that the soul shares with the divine, are the goods of the All insofar as the soul sheds its heteronomous activities and becomes like the gods, self-moved and self-identical.[66] Finally, and perhaps most interestingly for our purposes Proclus describes the *paradigmatic* cause of prayer as the "primary creative principles of reality," or, as we have repeatedly observed, the demiurge, the paradigm and the Good itself. By describing the *paradigmatic* cause as both that which has proceeded from the Good as well as that which has been "unified in a single ineffable union," Proclus reminds his readers of the demiurge's internalization of the intelligible paradigm and the Good. Due to this, one may easily surmise that the paradigmatic cause of prayer for the individual soul is the demiurgic union with the intelligible paradigm and the Good, a union that established not only the identity of the demiurge as the demiurge but also causes the procession of providence into the cosmos itself.[67] As Proclus writes in the *Platonic Theology*, "All immortal souls that obtained

66 For more on the role of prayer in the soul's acquisition of identity, self-movement and freedom see Layne (2013).

67 Here, we should emphasize that this unification, as it was for the demiurge, is not the soul transcending its own state and becoming identical to its object of contemplation. Rather one should be reminded of the now commonplace idea first heralded by Steel (1978) that the soul does not change in respect of substance but rather activates the intellect and one within itself. This is of course intimately connected to Proclus' agreement with Iamblichus against Plotinus where no part of the soul remains above at the higher levels of reality, i.e. the doctrine of the undescended soul. See Proclus, *In Tim.* I 333. 28, *ET* §211. Thus the height of ascent is not to become *identical* with god but to become *like* a god insofar as we reveal/actualize our most unified and intellective capacities. For more on the ascent of the soul and the establishment and activation of nous and the 'one in us' see *In Alc.* 247.8–249.15, *PT* I 3.15. See Van den Berg (2001) 46. See also *In Parm.* 641, 6–12 where Proclus

their procession from the Demiurge *are filled with the unified and noeric providence that comes from him*, because everywhere the offspring depending on its causes participates in the perfection that comes from them."[68]

Due to this understanding of the demiurge it becomes all the more significant that Proclus repeatedly identifies prayer and the ascent of the soul with a reversion to the demiurge, which in his account of prayer is explicitly linked with a kind of demiurgic harmonization of the 1) intellect and 2) will.[69] Regarding the value of unifying one's intellect to the demiurgic cause, Proclus, while discussing prayer and Timaeus' impending narration of the coming-into-being of the cosmos, emphasizes the Pythagorean's expressed desire to be in conformity with the intellect of the gods. In the process, he suggests in his exegesis of Timaeus' invocation that the unification of the soul's intellect with the intellect of the demiurge is the purpose of philosophical activity. He writes, "For this is the supreme end of philosophical speculation, to ascend to the divine intellect and to organize one's account of the realities in a manner comparable to the unified way in which all things have been grasped in advance in that mind."[70]

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argues that to become unified is to become deified. For the Iamblichean roots of the "one of the soul" see Addey (2012) and Iamblichus, *In Phaedrum*, Fr. 6, ed. John Dillon (1973); Cf. *DM* 239.6, 269.1–270.14. See Dillon (2012), n. 12 for a review of Marinus' *Vita Procli* which expertly suggests that Proclus had achieved a kind of unity or communion with the gods which allowed him considerable amount of expertise in theurgic activities like causing rain or healing the sick.

68 Proclus, *PT* V 19. (tr. Van den Berg, italics added for emphasis).

69 To be sure, we do not immediately invoke the demiurge in our prayers. Rather we must first invoke our more proximate cause, i.e. the leader god of our own series, and then slowly ascend to the demiurge who is its cause. As he writes in *De Sacrificio*, "For everything prays according to its own order and sings hymns on the leaders of the complete series." See Van den Berg (2001), 57. Van den Berg thus makes the argument that Proclus' hymns are his own attempts to invoke these leader gods so that he can eventually ascend to communing with the demiurge. This invoking of such lesser deities is especially noteworthy in Proclus' own prayers within his commentaries. See for instance *PT* 7.17–8.1 and *In Parm.* 617.1–13. Consider also Proclus' invocation of Athena at *In Tim.* I 168.22: "May she be gracious to us and grant us the gift of pure wisdom and the fulfillment with noeric power, while providing us with Olympic goods that elevate the souls and while banishing the Gigantic appearances produced by the world of becoming and while waking in us the pure and unperverted notions about the gods and while shining us with the divine light from herself." (tr. Van den Berg) See also *In Tim.* I 165.32–166.24 where Proclus identifies Athena with the power that proceeds from the unswerving and unflinching demiurge thus resulting in her characterization as wisdom-loving.

70 *In Tim.* I 221.1–3.

Certainly wishing to emphasize the difficulty of this process,[71] Proclus repeatedly identifies prayer and the ascent of the soul with the heights of intellective activity that has turned away from the faculties of opinion and discursive reasoning and thus joins itself to the demiurgic intellect.[72] He writes that "it is only when the soul has passed beyond the distraction of birth and the [process of] purification and beyond scientific knowledge that its intellective activity and the intellect in us lights up," leading to the moment in which the soul is anchored "in the Father" and established "immaculately in the demiurgic thoughts."[73] As R.M. Van den Berg has written, "These are the contemplations of

71 See *In Tim.* I 300.30–303.20. It should be noted that Proclus seemingly mirrors his own fivefold ascent of prayer in his discussion of the soul's unification with the demiurgic intellect. He describes the difficult activity of discovering the demiurge as requiring first knowledge of the divine symbols, and secondly an assimilation (ὁμοιωσις) and familiarization (οἰκειωσις). He further utilizes the language of contact (ἐπαφὴν), illumination (ἀναλάμπει) and unification (ἕνωσις) in this passage.

72 Bear in mind that Proclus distinguishes three different orders of soul, i.e. the irrational, rational and intellectual soul, corresponding to five different activities of knowledge, i.e. 1) opinion/*doxa*, 2) knowledge that proceeds from necessary principles or *dianoia*, 3) dialectics, 4) intuition and 5) divine unity. See *de Prov*., 16–20. Due to this one should recognize that Proclus is describing the fourth form of knowledge, which is the act of supreme intellection that contemplates being by "simple intuitions" or "immediate vision." See *De prov*. 30 and *In Alc*., 246.25–247.15. This form of knowledge is, for Proclus, no longer science but something else entirely as it imitates the Neoplatonic hypostasis of the intellect or the demiurgic intellect as much as is possible in its isomorphic relation to the subject of thinking, the object of thinking and the act of thinking. A soul at this level of knowing "thinks what they are and at the same time thinks that it is thinking, knowing also what it is itself." To be sure, Proclus reserves one more form of knowing which surpasses even the hypostasis of the Intellect and soars toward union with the divine hypostasis of the One/Good. In this Proclus discusses how this soul moves from the vantage point of the intellect to its ecstatic unity with the source of all providential concern. See *De prov*., 30 and 31. This is ultimately the ascent of the soul to the providential also established in the demiurgic cause. As Van den Berg (2001), 50 argues, "The position of Nous as the Demiurge and therefore ultimate cause of the cosmos helps to explain why a life in accordance with Nous is such an important step in the process of unification/deification of the human soul. The Demiurge contains all causes both of this universe and the intelligible realm. Thus the soul that shares in Nous by means of illumination increases its degree of unity and thus becomes more divine."

73 *In Tim*. I 302.17–22. Keep in mind at this level of knowledge, it is not our work that is ultimately responsible for our further ascent, but as Iamblichus would have readily argued, it was rather the divine beings who bring us to themselves, illuminating our souls in such higher levels of knowing. Cf. *In Parm*. 949. 1–24 where contemplation of

the Demiurge of the Forms, the initiation into the simple, unvarying and undivided visions of the *Phaedrus*."[74]

Alongside the embrace and internalization of the demiurgic intellect, Proclus also insists that the human soul must discover within itself the providence, i.e. the good, of the demiurgic creator. Declaring, in tune with Timaeus, that individuals with even a modicum of "good sense" or *sophrosyne*, defined here not as self-control but as "an inspired activity of the soul," will invoke and pray to the gods, Proclus argues that the prayerful are those who have established "themselves in the goodness of the gods," and are thus those who realize via their contact with the divine that within even the most insignificant of things lies a trace of the kindness, truth and beauty of the Good.[75] As such, Proclus heralds, in his defense of prayer, those individuals who "[…] observe the power of providence penetrating the whole of reality."[76] As a result of such an identification of the prayerful and the recognition of providence, the person of *sophrosyne* can be said to pray merely for the gift of prayer insofar as the efficacy of prayer itself is an act of divine providence that establishes communion, i.e. the end of prayer. In this description of the truly prayerful Proclus remarkably unpacks a slightly enigmatic moment in the *Timaeus* itself, the Pythagorean's apparent lack of an explicit prayer to the gods. For Proclus, Pythagoras need not overtly pray insofar as the beginning and end of prayer is established in the unity of the divine will and the philosopher's will to return to her own causes:

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the forms is described as a divine activity caused by the illumination of the gods, not ourselves or our own faculties. Consequently, Proclus argues that contemplation of the forms is aptly compared to mystic rites and initiations which conduct "our souls up to the vault of heaven, and the heaven itself, and the place above heaven, calling the vision of those same forms perfect and unwavering apparitions and also 'simple' and 'happy.'"

74 Van den Berg (2001) 52. Van den Berg goes on to show how this process is identified in Proclus with a reaching of the paternal harbor, a Chaldean image [see Lewy (1978), 212–213], which is equivalent to the touching of the soul with the noetic father (the exact identity of which is obscure). For references to this image and for the controversies of identifying the exact meaning of this level of ascent see Van den Berg (2001), 54–55 and 272, (2000) 427–443. Cf. *PT* IV 13 as well as *De prov.*, 16–20 and 30 as well as *In Alc.* 246.25–247.15. Cf. Iamblichus, *DM* V 26 where he argues that prayer brings human beings to the highest level of consciousness of which they are capable. See Addey (2012), for a detailed exegesis of this passage. See also Corrigan (1996), 28–42.

75 *In Tim.* I 212.19–25 and 215.15.

76 *In Tim.* I 215.7.

> [W]hat belongs to the will (τῇ βουλήσει) includes its accomplishment in itself, while what follows on from the will inclines to another activity and through action completes what had been willed.[77] The philosophical life is dependent on our purposeful will, and what is deficient in it results from the deficiency in our will. […] We would be justified, therefore, in claiming that the activity of prayer belongs to that which has its full completion in the will itself. The will to pray is a desire for reversion to the gods. This desire guides the desirous soul and unites it to the divine which in our view was the very first task of prayer. One should not, therefore, will first and pray later, but rather the will and practice of prayer should go together in accordance with the measure of the intention, now more and now less. […] This then is what Timaeus does here. The things which he prays to the gods to accomplish, these he too fulfills in accordance with the human intellect by ordering his entire account in conformity with the intellect of the gods.[78]
>
> trs. RUNIA and SHARE, slightly modified

In this attempt to explain Timaeus' apparent lack of prayer, Proclus emphasizes that the philosopher's will to pray is already the act of prayer because it manifests the will for reunion, the will to join our intellect and our projects to the divine and, in the end, it is to this communion or reunion that the true philosopher aims. Moreover, the will for reunion, for the good, is not something made or created by the soul itself. Rather, the will to pray results from the

77 While I believe that Runia and Share's translation of *boulesis* with "decision" is apt concerning the context of the passage in which the emphasis is on resolution and decisiveness versus a mere willing or blind willing, I amended the passage to reflect the standard translation of *boulesis*. On the importance of decisiveness and the need for divine assistance in prayer see *In Tim.* I 215.30–216.7.

78 Proclus, *In Tim.* I 221.12–222.5: ὅτι, φήσομεν ἡμεῖς, τὰ μὲν ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ βουλήσει τὸ τέλος ἔχει συνειλημμένον, τὰ δὲ μετὰ τὴν βούλησιν εἰς ἄλλην ἐνέργειαν ἀπονεύει καὶ διὰ πράξεως ἀνύει τὸ βουληθέν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ζωὴ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἤρτηται βουλήσεως, καὶ τὸ ἐλλεῖπον ἐν αὐτῇ παρὰ τὴν βούλησίν ἐστιν ἐλλείπουσαν· ἡ δὲ τῶν ἐκτὸς περιποίησις καὶ δευτέρας ἐνεργείας δεῖται μετὰ τὴν βούλησιν· οὐ γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτῶν κεῖται τὸ τέλος. τούτων τοίνυν τῶν ἐν τῷ βούλεσθαι τὴν τελειότητα πᾶσαν ἐχόντων καὶ τὸ τῆς εὐχῆς ἂν θειήμεθα δικαίως· ἡ γὰρ βούλησις τῆς εὐχῆς ἔφεσίς ἐστι τῆς εἰς θεοὺς ἐπιστροφῆς· ἡ δὲ ἔφεσις αὕτη συνάγει τὴν ἐφιεμένην ψυχὴν καὶ συνάπτει πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, ὃ δὴ πρώτιστον ἔργον ἡμῖν ἐφαίνετο τῆς εὐχῆς. οὐκ ἄρα βουληθῆναι δεῖ πρότερον, εὔξασθαι δὲ ὕστερον, ἀλλ' ἅμα τε βούλεταί τις καὶ τὴν εὐχὴν ἔχει κατὰ τὸ τῆς βουλήσεως μέτρον, ὃ μὲν μᾶλλον, ὃ δὲ ἧττον. […] τοῦτο δὴ οὖν καὶ ὁ Τίμαιος ἐνταῦθα ποιεῖ· ἃ γὰρ εὔχεται τοῖς θεοῖς ἐπιτελεῖν, ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ἀποπληροῖ κατὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον νοῦν διατιθεὶς ἑπομένως τῷ τῶν θεῶν νῷ τὸν σύμπαντα λόγον. See also Layne 2013.

demiurgic will, from the providence gracing all things. Thus when a philosopher like Timaeus (or Proclus for that matter) discourses on the true causes of all things, willing at the outset to be in concord with the divine, she prays decisively and thus internalizes and hopefully also projects the divine content and causes of the soul.[79] As Neoplatonic commentator Werner Beierwaltes has written:

> Given that methods indicate the act of philosophizing, thus the return of thinking into itself and the surpassing beyond itself to the One—prayer, however, is the word originating from the intentionality of thinking that praises, venerates and petitions its origin in a personal-dialogical relation—can it be said that prayer is an essential element of the philosophical method itself. In this way, in the thinking of the origin, the necessary unity of philosophy and religion arises in Procline thinking. Prayer is as an element of the philosophical method "demythologized" or rationalized.[80]
>
> tr. TYLER TRITTEN

79 Here, we should be mindful of the sacred underpinnings inherent in publishing a commentary on Plato. Proclus' less than remarkable student, Marinus, decided to burn his observations on Plato's *Philebus* when Isidore politely described his work as "satisfactory (ἱκανὰ)." In other words, Marinus' exegesis may have been instructive, perhaps even correct, but correct instruction is not the goal of commentary. Instead, as Damascius describes of Isidore's own pedagogical practices, one should strive to persuade students to philosophy "by placing eyes in their soul (ὄψιν ἐντιθέναι τῇ ψυχῇ), or rather cleansing those which are already there." Damascius, *Philosophical History* § 38. See also Van den Berg (2001) 212 and 231 who comments on the sacred nature of philosophical texts in the ascent of the soul in Proclus' hymn to the Muses and later to the gods of wisdom. For Proclus' own prayer life see Dillon (2012) 35–50 which draws heavily from Marinus' *Vita Procli*. Cf. Bechtle (2012) who while engaging in Simplicius' commentary works argues for the role of Aristotle's *Categories* as also part and parcel of the spiritual development of the philosopher.

80 "Da Methode den Akt des Philosophierens, den Rückgang des Denkens in sich selbst also und den Überstieg über sich selbst auf das Eine hin meint, Gebet aber das der Intentionalität des Denkens entspringende Wort ist, das seinen Ursprung in einem personal-dialogischen Bezug preisend, verehrend und bittend anspricht, kann gesagt werden, Gebet sei ein wesentliches Element der philosophischen Methode selbst. So zeigt sich gerade im Denken des Ursprungs die notwendige Einheit von Philosophie und Religion im proklischen Denken. Das Gebet wird als ein Element der philosophischen Methode 'entmythologisiert' oder rationalisiert" (1976) 315.

In other words, philosophy and the methods of the philosopher are activities of prayer or ascent and so, in the end, it could be said that Timaeus' entire likely story is a prayer insofar as it resembles the creative task of the demiurge himself. In fact, due to his narration of the cosmology which is truly a theology, Timaeus' likely story becomes a prayer or act of reversion which links the object of study, the cosmos and its true causes, to the subject of study, the human soul. Furthermore, as the Pythagorean would readily admit, his account is neither set into motion merely by his own desires nor by chance; he is not a self-thinking intellect who plans to narrate his own spontaneous opinions of the coming-into-being of the cosmos. Rather, his prayer, his account of the All, can be called both an *eikôs muthos* and the truth[81] because it resembles that which it invokes, the cosmos and its demiurgic maker. Only in this way could Timaeus imitate and thus pray, as he admits to Critias, "to that god who has recently been created by our speech (although in reality created of old)."[82]

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81 *In Tim*. I 410.11–411.2 where Proclus explains how Timaeus' account is both likely (*eikos*), insofar as it refers to the cosmos which is an image itself, and true, insofar as it emphasizes the providence of the demiurge and is thus directed at an object of knowledge. He further argues that the truth refers to the fact that Timaeus clearly is using all the various types of knowledge found within the human soul. Cf. 218.20–28, 223.10–30, 243.26–246.9 See also *PT* V 17.66 where Proclus clearly identifies Timaeus' words with the parallel to the demiurgic intellections and *PT* V 20.75 where he describes Timaeus' likely story as "a hymn to the demiurge and father of the cosmos" that celebrates his product and the gifts he has given to the world.

82 *Critias* 106a.

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The Transmission of Fire: Proclus' Theurgical Prayers

José Manuel Redondo

Let us run towards the heat,
escaping from the cold.
Let us become fire,
let us walk through the fire.
We have an easy way for the ascension;
the Father guides us unfolding ways of fire.
Hymn to the God or Fire-song (7–12)

• • •

Hearken, you gods holding the helm of holy wisdom,
who, having kindled an upward-leading fire, draw to the immortals
human souls, who leave the dark hole behind,
purified by the secret initiations of hymns.
Hymn common to the gods (IV, 1–7)

∴

Theurgists on Fire

By praying, theurgists return to the gods their loving gift to us humans: prayer, given to us by the gods through the theurgists, who by praying, singing hymns, imitate the gods, assimilating to them. A "kind of circle that both begins from the gods and ends with them", says Proclus, in his well-known passage on prayer from his *Commentary on the Timaeus*.[1] A conception of prayer in agreement with what seems a goddess of theurgy itself, Hecate, who in the *Chaldean Oracles*, when manifesting herself in response to the eloquent prayers of the theurgists, declares right at her arrival that human beings have discovered

1 *In Tim.* I 210.10–11.

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prayer "at the suggestion of the gods" (f. 222[2]). For the theurgists, "athletes of fire",[3] when possessed by love to/from the gods, their soul is ablaze. Being ignited ("… the fire-heated thought …"; "has lit the fire …"; "By making the soul bright with fire"),[4] catches the fire of erotic *mania* (μανία), which works like a symbolic reminiscence analogous to intellectual reminiscence but not identical; its counterpart or other side, so to speak. It is activated by sympathy (συμπάθεια) and persuasion (πειθώ), the way we may say that Socrates, trying to persuade beautiful Phaedrus on the nature of love (in the Platonic dialogue of the same name), acts as a divine statue (ἄγαλμα) of love. As I will point out later in the text, the metaphor of the theurgist who animates a statue of a god, preparing himself and becoming a statue of the god, I think it is important for understanding theurgy: in a manner suitable, the theurgist prepares himself to take the form of the god, the way he prepares a statue to receive a god, so as to become unified with it, the same way a statue does.

This symbolic reminiscence activated by sympathy and persuasion cannot be demonstrated, occurring beyond intellect; both above and below it, all around it but from its very center, if I may recur to a rather cryptic description. It may be beyond intellect but it is innate in us[5] and works in a similar way as myths do, as Proclus will persuasively argue regarding how Plato cared in his dialogues that we may not only exercise the intellectual part of the soul, but that we may also perfect the divine part through sympathy with the mysteries by a kind of inspired, entheastic (ἐνθεαστικόν) discourse, not demonstrative (ἀποδεικτικόν).[6] This double aspect of theurgical activity, erotic and intellectual, I will argue, may be contextualized in Proclus' double metaphysics: henadology and ontology. Two aspects that seem to have been considered by modern research in a rather literal, separate, linear way, where one comes first and then the other. However, I think it is possible that Proclus might be thinking of both as simultaneous; actually, if I may put it so, as equally both linear and simultaneous. If this were the case, then the resulting model of theurgy, we may infer, may be, in some important though subtle aspects, somewhat different than what has been supposed. It seems that the problem of the relationship between the gods and the forms is of great relevance here. The forms are the causes of the sensible

2 Considered a doubtful fragment.

3 *DM* II 10, 92.10.

4 *Chaldean Oracles*, fr. 139 ("… the fire-heated thought …"), 126 ("has lit the fire …") and 122 ("By making the soul bright with fire").

5 For Iamblichus an ἔμφυτος γνῶσις, natural, innate knowledge superior to all reasoning and demonstration; *DM* I 3, 7.11–12.

6 *P.T.* I 6.

and the henads or divine unities—the gods—may be thought of as the causes of the forms; however, this attribution to the henads may be made only by analogy; that is, the henads cannot just be identified as causes, causality belonging to the forms. So the henads and the forms are somehow continuous but also parallel; may we say simultaneous? They are not reducible one to the other; or they are and at the same time they are not.[7] Two facets mirrored by the human being: "We are images of intellective essences, but statues of unknown signs".[8]

For the ignition of the fire wherein the soul is combusted in the light and heat of the gods, for that sympathy to happen as perfectly as possible, is necessary to do it at the right time. By coordinating with the cosmos, operating according to the appropriate astral cycles which compose the soul of the world, theurgists realize their different activities—like animating a statue—thus assimilating them to the order expressed by the celestial *logos*. I will point to the importance of astrology in this respect, arguing that Platonist's theurgy is astrological, the way it may be said that the whole cosmos is an astrological effect where all its beings are dancing and singing astrologically, that is, according to an intelligence that manifests in the heavens, in its cyclic rhythms: an activity theurgists imitate, both naturally or instinctively and rationally.[9]

In the present paper I will investigate the notion of prayer, which in practice is manifested by hymn-singing, thus becoming coextensive with theurgy in Proclus, prayer as a theurgical activity shared by the gods, the theurgists and the whole cosmos. I will emphasize the continuity, not the identity, of prayer—

7 For Proclus, for example, the analogy between the forms and the gods seems such that it always stays thus, never both of those terms being completely identified. We may even say that this analogical relationship is metaphysical for Proclus, though not ontological, since the gods, as mythological representations of the *henads*, are as such above being; thus, their nature is unknowable; however, they may be known by way of analogy and similarity through their own symbols and signs, but not by trying to think about them—the gods—through their symbols, but through their symbols being able to unite with them. Cf. "Since Iamblichus asserts that questions may be discussed, in a philosophical, theological, or theurgical manner, it is possible to see the cosmological description of the Forms as proper to philosophical discourse while an anagogic description would stress the theurgic function of the Forms as *sunthêmata*. In other words, although every soul was created by the Demiurge with "harmonic ratios" (*logoi harmonikoi*) (*In Tim.* I 4.32), and "divine symbols" (*sumbôla theia*; *In Tim.* I, 4, 32–33) the former were active in all souls by virtue of cosmogenesis while the later remained inactive until awakened in theurgy. Thus, when the *logoi* that constitute the soul's essence were ritually appropriated and awakened in the life of the soul, these *logoi* could then be called *sumbôla* or *sunthêmata*". Shaw (1995), 164–165.

8 *Chal. Phil.* 5, 211.18–25.

9 Cf. *On Providence* 39; *In Tim.* I 208.3–7; 212.8–10 and 215.8–16.

hymn-singing—theurgy in terms of practice, not in terms of theory.[10] To this end I will be presenting an outline of some of the main ideas that I have been working on in connection with my PhD research related to the problem of theurgy in late antique Platonism in general, particularly Proclus' conception, specifically in regard to his text on the hieratic art (ἱερατικῆς τέχνης), a work on the principles of theurgy, where, right from what seems the opening lines, Proclus makes an analogy between practising theurgy and being in love, a state that ignites the "transmission of fire" (πυρὸς διάδοσις). My reasons for presenting this outline is to contextualize theurgy philosophically as much as possible, given the current space limitations. While I will make observations regarding philosophical notions expressed in several other of his texts,[11] I will focus mainly on the passages from the treatise *On the hieratic art of the Greeks*, considered a very important surviving exposition of ancient philosophy on theurgy, as well as on the fragments of *The Chaldaic Philosophy*, unfortunately another incomplete testimony of Proclus' theurgical philosophy, as his own hymns—those few ones preserved complete—may be said to be a testimony of his theurgical activities; regarding which we also have as a witness Proclus' "biographer", Marinus.[12]

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10 Both Furley (2007) and Van den Berg (2001) treat together hymns and prayers, acknowledging their overlap as well as pointing out how they may be distinguished (actually Van den Berg refers to Furley's earlier work). As we will see, Proclus treats them as synonymous when discussing theurgy. Furley stresses how important and all-encompassing prayer and hymn-singing were for the Greeks; a practice kept continuous from archaic times to late antiquity in Athens. Furley also points out how prayers and hymns share myth as an argumentative strategy to promote grace (*charis*) from the gods through the beautiful expression of gratefulness on the part of the human being.

11 As well as to Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, here considered as a very important and relatively necessary reference for Proclus' theurgy, as they seem to share the same basic theological principles, both theoretical and practical, while it can't be denied that there are also important specific differences, differences which, however, it is my understanding that they seem to be secondary in the overall vision of these philosophers who consider themselves to be Platonists; while being secondary doesn't lessen the value and necessity of this differences being acknowledged, all the more important when for their metaphysics peculiarity or singularity is a value on its own, we may say.

12 The translations from Proclus' passages *On the hieratic art* are mine. The only translation in English that I know of is found in Copenhaver (1988); the edition of the Greek is taken from Bidez (1928). Some portions of the text are also translated into English by Van den Berg (2001). For Proclus' hymns, see Van den Berg (2001) (The translation of the fragment of the *Hymn common to the Gods* is taken from here) as well as Alvarez Hoz y García Ruiz (2003). Regarding Proclus' biography (*Vita Procli*) by Marinus, see Alvarez Hoz y García

Towards a Unified Pluralist Approach to Theurgy

It is now becoming a commonplace in studies on Neoplatonic theurgy to point out how in the last decades the assessment of the ancient Platonists' practice of rituals has changed enormously in some respects, being, at least in specialized circles, no longer considered an embarrassing fact for the history of philosophy. In part this has occurred due to pertinent comparative studies between theurgy and diverse Mediterranean and Near-Eastern religious, mystical, magical and divinatory traditions; fields of study which, significantly, have also suffered important changes in the last decades, among them, a growing awareness of the indissoluble link between divination and magic, as well as between divination and religion,[13] these three aspects actually encompassed by what Platonists call theurgy. Both a philosophical and mystical interpretation of Mediterranean religious traditions (Greek, Egyptian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Persian, etc.) which conceives magic and divination as two facets of a complex activity supposed to be necessarily examined and practiced critically through philosophy but at the same time providing a non-discursive philosophical language in a sense complementary to formal demonstration, but in another sense superior to it.

To speak of *theurgy* in late Platonism in general is a useful standardization performed by modern academic research, but which may limit our understanding of what is envisaged as a very complex and polyvalent phenomenon which in its different facets is designated by several names (*hieratike techne, telestike, katharmoi, mystagogy*, *theosophy*, *hiera hagisteia*, *theagogia*, *he theia episteme*, *hierourgia*, *theon therapeia*, *telesiourgy*, etc.) However, there seems to be lacking a discussion of theurgy as a *philosophical praxis*; that is, not as a religious, magical or even esoteric practice done by philosophers,[14] and thus conceived not as a complement to philosophy, but as a philosophical practice *per se*. Certainly, Proclus refers to theurgists (οἱ ἱερατικοὶ) as the ancient sages (πάλαι σοφοί) to whom the hieratic art was revealed, thus making of theurgy an equivalent to standard, traditional divine service. Nevertheless this seems

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Ruiz (1999) and Edwards (2000). For passages in *V.P.* about Proclus' theurgical activities, see specially paragraphs 17–19, 24, 28–29.

13 For a recent and insightful up-date of this discussion, see Johnston (2008), particularly ch. 5, *The Mantis and the Magician*. Interestingly, both theurgy and the practices of the *Greek Magical Papyri* are characterized as "divinatory magic". Divination as the language of magic, 13 and 166–169. Divination as the instantiation of myths, 114.

14 Which has also been pertinently equated with diverse Eastern meditational and ritual practices like Tibetan Buddhism or Indian Tantra by reasearchers like Shaw or Bussanich.

to be affirmed only by the philosophers. So, I would like to propose that while Proclus seems to consider theurgy as an exercise of both poetic and ritual analogical thought and living, theurgy itself is regarded in Proclus' philosophy as analogous to the religious, mystical and magical ancient traditions, but not identical—what we may call a holistic hermeneutical exercise that requires both a philosophical understanding of analogy and an analogical understanding of philosophy.[15]

In late antique Platonism, theurgy is conceived according to lengthy and complex argumentative exercises regarding the limitations of reason and language. The goal of theurgy, divinization, expressed in mythical form, is consummated in the ecstatic union of the soul with its leader or guardian deity through that which is called psychologically the *one in the soul*, or in the poetics of revelation, the *flower of the intellect* and the *flower of the whole soul*. Such an experience seems to imply the creation, or activation, of a *divine self*, mediated by complex thought and imaginative techniques as well as by the ethical practice that purifies both, driven in coordinated fashion by an orientation towards eros,—that is to say, by beauty: a conception—making a very wide generalization—where the imagination, in a deep and important sense, may be a vehicle of knowledge and even be identified with *noesis*, primary or essential knowledge. In a way, the imagination is represented as the fundamental epistemological activity of the soul, there where we perceive both sensation and thought—the foundation of all of our experience as memory.

The imagination has an active role in revealing knowledge, but in order to effectively do so it is necessary that the philosopher generates the corresponding state of fitness (ἐπιτεδειότης) or capacity to receive that knowledge, to transform the imagination into a vehicle of comprehension by means of the ethical reform of his body, his emotions and his thought, but according to an integral conception of thought much broader and deeper than the mere exercise of rational discursivity, but that which integrates and coordinates simultaneously sensation, emotion and reflexivity. This active or creative imagination, in a way also pictured as a heavenly fire descending from the stars, is the faculty of divinization *par excellence*; the imagination divinizes—if I may put it so; it is hieratic, it is theurgy or divine action, a creative or demiurgic dynamic.[16]

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15 In Platonism philosophy is presented as analogous to the mysteries, while the priestly art and to divination (understood as self-knowledge); is analogous to mathematics and science, to technique and artistic creation, to therapeutics and politics; philosophy is analogous to eros and death just as loving and dying, seeing and inspired creation are considered as analogous to knowing, we may say.

16 Gregory Shaw, whose work has been a very important contribution towards a deeper,

Soul irradiates intelligence and life to bodies as the heavens emanate light to our world, thus participating in the divine, being eternally created. The human being, through soul, his essential nature considered precisely as his soul, participates in that which may be said to characterize divinity: creativity, actualizing their capacity as co-creators and rulers of the cosmos of their experience. But they may do this only according to *their capacity* to align with the divine, so to speak.[17] All theurgical acts are done by assimilation and familiarity, not by compulsion.[18] Theurgists never believe that they can coerce the gods, as vulgar magicians do, but they are the loving servitors of loving deities, in their turn, the loving servitors of an utterly transcendent, unknowable and ineffable first god, or first principle, depending on whether we recur to a theological or metaphysical discourse, to refer to that which is also represented both as Unity and the Good.

The hieratic arts are contextualized according to several *simultaneous* philosophical perspectives—theological, cosmological, psychological, literary, etc.—all analogues to each other in several possible ways.[19] One of the most important of such perspectives is the philosophical notion of *mania*, inspired knowledge, metaphorically termed *madness* as referring to something incomprehensible and related to the above-mentioned critical consciousness of the Platonists regarding the limits of discursive rationality's formal demonstrations. Like Socrates in the opening passage of the *Phaedrus*, the *maniai*, the diverse forms of divine inspiration, as an experience, not only as a concept, take us away from the public places or common notions of our mental *polis*, outside

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more sensible understanding of Neoplatonic theurgy, has pointed out how theurgy for the Platonists is a recreation of demiurgy, the activity of the creator god presented by Plato in the *Timaeus*. See Shaw (1995) ch. I, 4 "Theurgy as demiurgy". Cf. Proclus' *In Parm.* IV, 847.

17 What was said above regarding ἐπιτεδειότης Cf. *DM* II 11. See also Shaw (1995), 84 n. 4 where Shaw states that *epitedeiotes* "was a technical term to describe the mystical or theurgic "capacity" of a soul". He gives the following references: *DM* 125, 5; 29, 1; 105, 1; 127, 9; 233, 1.

18 Cf. *DM* III 18.

19 It is in this context of Proclus' proposal of the exercise of several different and simultaneous discourses by the philosopher (scientific, poetic, logical, symbolic, etc; *P.T.* I 4; *In. Parm.* I 646.16–647.15) that we, as an exercise, may try understand theurgy from what we may call *a simultaneous unity of a plurality of perspectives*. For Proclus those discourses seem to be understood as analogs but irreducible one to the other, then, none of them in sole possession of the truth, or all of them, in their own way, simultaneously true. Ultimate truth, being beyond representation: a sort of emptiness, but rather an incomprehensible infinite fullness, or unity, regarding which, reason must rationally conclude the impossibility of a rational knowledge.

the walls of our ordinary cultural habits. Could we thus view theurgy as a kind of *reasonable madness*, a form of ethical symbolical practice based on what we may call aesthetic experiments of thought or philosophical performances?[20] Ethics may be understood as analogous to ritual practice as the repetition of the paradigmatic, considered as divine (speaking more strictly, the divine is the origin of the paradigmatic); the establishment of a virtue as a habit that incarnates, that expresses in the world—thus manifesting the divine—what is just in itself or the idea of justice, for example, through the philosopher's just actions. The just and good human being, by reason of this, assimilates to the divine, becoming its living pious image (Cf. *Rep*. 383c). Besides, we can say, after Plato's *Euthyphro*, that to be pious and holy is an expression of wisdom that lies in virtue, not in a technical procedure; a conception that will find an echo in the theurgists' criticism of magicians but also diviners like Euthyphro.[21]

Initiatory rites (τελεστική), for example, seem to be interpreted as, and at the same time, through, the ethical perfectioning (τελέω) of the soul. Philosophically, divination is understood as a practice of self-knowledge that employs analogical forms of language and thinking,[22] Socrates being the exemplary diviner, who made his life's work to interpret the Delphic oracle, not just intellectually but mainly, or rather, integrally, by the way he lived.[23] For the Platonists philosophy is the original activity of the human being, not just the activity of a group of specialists, professionals and bureaucrats; the philosopher is, or ought to be, the paradigmatic human being. For the Platonists, putting it very simply, we may say that religion, as regards the individual, is to be understood as an ethical practice; and regarding the community, as politics, both expressed and practiced in mythical language (among other possibilities of philosophical discourse); reifying thus the celestial script of the cosmic law or *Logos*.[24]

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20 Cf. *DM* II 11.96–97; συμβόλοις μυσταγωγίας (*symbolic mystagogy*), VII 1.

21 It seems that the *Euthyphro* has been a neglected dialogue, even if its contribution is "minor", in the research about Platonic theurgy. Here it is stated how the gods do not need to receive cult from humans as if they were dependent on them or as if they could affect them somehow; while what they like is to be pleased by humans. It is ironic that Iamblichus' seeming discomfort with the innovators on divine matters was that which the accusers of Socrates charged him for: innovation on divine matters (3b).

22 Already Plotinus clearly expresses this; see II 3 [52] 7.1–15; III 1 [3] 6.20 and 4.30–45. But for analogical thinking as a characteristic of Greek divination in general, see Bonnechere (2007), 146.

23 For Iamblichus, for example, true divination is identified with what he considers it is the true philosophical understanding (*DM* III 31).

24 For late antique Platonists' "mystical" politics, O'Meara (2003).

In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents a model of analysis on causality where he distinguishes between a secondary or auxiliary causality,[25] which refers to that which is more immediate, and a primary or essential causality which refers not anymore to the *how* but to the *what* and above all the *why*; what is the end, the reason of being, the meaning or purpose of something. Expressed in a very general way, primary and secondary causality operate simultaneously for Platonists, necessarily together, inseparable despite the possibility and necessity of distinguishing them, since they operate at different levels. According to this model, theurgy only secondarily can be considered a technique and a human activity that operates through the network of natural correspondences between the gods and diverse substances, theurgy being essentially an eternal intelligible activity of the gods, primary causality, in which not only the human being participates but also the cosmological and natural dynamics; themselves an image, an eternal recreation of divine activity. That is, the cosmos is the result or effect of the god's theurgies. If it is thought that the gods illuminate the philosopher's imagination,[26] this is imagined according to a mythological hermeneutics that interprets mythic images simultaneously as representations of metaphysical and ethical dynamics, in turn conceived as analogous to the cosmological dynamics. So it is that the same cosmological activity may be formally reasoned as caused by the intelligible, and reasoned by the imagination (νοῦς φανταστικός) as originating in the gods. The fundamental analogy is between the forms and the gods, but to talk of the gods as such presupposes already a poetic theology or mythological hermeneutics, while talking about the forms presupposes coordinated metaphysical and ethical hermeneutics.

This causality model implies, in its turn, and in terms of human psychology, a corresponding twofold model of reason and rationality in dialectical relationship: a primary reason and rationality, an active intellect, cause of our being and of our activity of knowing or *noesis* and a secondary form of reason and rationality, a passive intellect whose activity is reflexive discourse or *dianoia*, according to Plotinus' standardization.[27] Again, this model in its turn implies a corresponding twofold model of language: one side of it based on human convention, whose dynamic, in philosophical use, must be logical; and the other, a

25 *Tim*. 46d–e; 47a–b. Cf. *Phil*. 27a; *Pol*. 281c–e.

26 See for example *DM* III 14 and *In Remp*. I 39.9–17.2, 167.2–6 and 17–23.

27 A distinction very similar to the Platonic *noesis* and *dianoia* (*Rep*. VI 509d). For Plotinus see, for example, V 9 [5] 3 and V 9 [5] 5.1–10. However, they may be distinguished, but their "real" difference is not literal nor logical, but in the end, I would say, metaphorical. For Plato, true being is to be apprehended by *noesis* together with *logos*. (*Tim*. 28a) Cf. *In Tim*. I 341.13–16; I 248.1–6.

natural, metaphorical aspect of language whose dynamics are based on affinity and similarity, expression of a non-linear, erotic, both a *sub-* and *meta-cognitive* dimension: a farfetched description of something conceived as so simple or unitary that analysis, by itself, can't grasp it. Theurgical integral exercises of symbolic exegesis incorporate in a rigorous and systematic way analogy, symbol and metaphor as part of a method of metaphysical reflection that coordinates both poles of thought: formal, demonstrative reasoning and intuitive reasoning, which thinks through images in terms of wholes, thus going beyond and at the same time integrating the limitations of discursive reasoning whose virtue is revealed in its capacity to delimitate; its function, in the last instance, corresponding to its capacity to limit itself.[28] Such metaphysical considerations must be coordinated with the study of diverse philosophical and scientific disciplines just as with the philosopher's own ethical development. This comprehensive or integral coordination of knowledge with life culminates, at the end of both the Platonic curriculum of study and at the end of the curriculum of ethical development, in theological hermeneutics as well as in theurgical practices.[29]

The Platonic Cave Movie-Theater

So, given the complexity and richness of the theurgist's exegetical methods, we may ask: when Platonists pray, singing hymns, did they *believe* in their gods? Perhaps not like *most of us believe* they did. While theurgists share many technical procedures with religious and magical practitioners, they do not seem to believe in the gods the way many of their contemporaries did. While for an external observer theurgists, on the one hand, and religious and magical practitioners, on the other, both may seem to be performing the same actions, the understanding of theurgists regarding what they do and their motivations for doing so, their experience of it, in general, would be very different, or may be, even the opposite.

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28 Brisson (2004) contextualizes the use of myth by the philosophers as an acknowledgement of the limits of reason which leads not to irrationalism; "the power of reason paradoxically lies in its ability to recognize its own limits" (see Introduction, 3). It was the philosophers who saved the myths, according to Brisson's formula.

29 Marinus' *V.P.* portrays, for instance, such a program of integral education. Proclus' life is narrated according to the ground plan of ethical and intellectual development, considered a parallel and necessary complement. Cf. *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, 7–12; 24–27.

I would like to suggest that theurgists believed in the gods the way we may be said to believe in the characters of a movie: in a delimited ritual space, inside the movie theater, during the projection of the film, we believe, we identify ourselves—by means of sympathy—with several characters; we suffer or rejoice with them, we live an experience that transforms us both emotionally and intellectually, an experience that acquires a life of its own, its own reality, at the same time ourselves losing our own identity somehow united with this reality of its own, but once the movie is over no one has to worry about the literal existence or non-existence of the characters. Moreover, the observer of the movie performs an exegesis believing that he sees those characters and scenes that so intensely affect him, in what are but colorful patterns and forms of lights (φωτός χαρακτήρ[30]) reflected on a screen; light, of course, being one of the favorite metaphors used by the theurgists to describe the gods' nature. So we watch the movie both with our eyes and with our thought, with our imagination; it is the imagination which gives continuity to the activity of our eyes and thought. The experience of one person with an educated thought and sensibility will differ quite a lot from someone who has not had such an education, even when for an external observer they might seem to be performing the same action (like a theurgist and a magician), watching a movie.

But regarding this analogy I may be asked:[31] what happens, then, after the movie, when we go outside the theater? What I would reply is that one would go out into "real life", which actually is a greater movie theater. Let us say, simplifying things a lot, that for the Greeks, the theater is a temple of Dionysus, where he actually receives cult, sacrifice; *where he lives*. A place, where, during the performance, something of its own—the play—takes reality, *takes form*; in the process, transforming the spectator, who for some moments loses his identity, at the same time becoming a dynamic unity of some kind. But after the play, he goes out into the greatest theater-temple: the cosmos. What happens in the movie theater would be an imitation of what happens in the cosmos, in its turn an imitation or image … which is in its turn an image … The world conceived as a theater is a metaphor that Greek philosophers seemed to like;

30 *Photos charakter*: traditional luminous symbols and patterns that correspond to each divinity, revealed by the same during their apparitions or visions. *In Crat*. 71, 31, 6–8. Cf. *Chaldean Oracles*, f. 146; and also Iamblichus on φωταγογία in *DM* III, 14 (132, 15; 134, 2; 134, 5–6; 134, 8).

31 When I had the opportunity of presenting this analogy in a paper at the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, eleventh annual conference (Cardiff, U.K., 2013) I had interesting questions and feedback from my colleagues, whom I thank very much. I was asked the same question I try to answer in the text, in respect to this question.

especially Platonists, in relation to Providence, for example;[32] but also as an illustration of the illusory nature of the world we perceive, Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic* being the main reference in this regard and related to my analogy. We know that caves were widely used as temples and that even a cave is seen as the paradigmatic temple of the gods and representation of the cosmos, as in Porphyry's *On the cave of the nymphs*.[33] Following Plotinus' analogy of the cosmos as a fantastic spell, we may say, as he does, that we shouldn't be surprised by this kind of analogy, like this one of the movie theater. We love the movies, as Plotinus says regarding music, because we like to be bewitched by the films, their luminous apparitions, dramatic music and dialogues. We may be said to link up with the characters of the movie, the way Plotinus says we link with the stars through prayer by a kind of connection (σύναψις) and corresponding disposition. The influx of the stars on us operates this way, the same as with the magical arts (μάγων τέχναι), where all is directed to the said connection or union (συναφή), through powers that follow sympathetically (συμπαθῶς); an attunement (συμφωνία) between similars (ὁμοίων). He sees as a form of spell the inherent natural power of chant, sound and gestures; a power that seems to direct itself not to the will nor to reason, but to the irrational soul. Plotinus will qualify as true magic (ἀληθινὴ μαγεία) the alternations between Friendship and Discord in the All. He even characterizes the superior kind of philosophy as a spell (ἐπῳδή).[34]

In Iamblichus, for example, for the theurgists in ecstasy, taking the forms of the gods (θεῶν σχῆμα), these reveal themselves in the human soul illuminating it. Divine apparitions moved by the will of the gods who possess our imaginative power.[35] But Proclus too will speak about the fantasy of ritual acts beautified by art, as well as about the visions of the gods, who project a divine light, presenting an image of their power through manifest symbols. The theurgist becomes like an extension of the gods, filled with their power, embraced by the divine light.[36] So the theurgist, then, may be thought of as using the same *demiurgical* mechanism as used in the cave/movie theater, but consciously, within himself and with an experienced and loving know-how, but above all with piety and knowledge.

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32 Plotinus (III, 2 and 3) or Proclus (*Ten doubts concerning Providence*), for example.

33 1–7; 20–22; 27–31.

34 IV 4 [28] 25–41. For philosophy as a spell: V 3 [49] 17.18–20, in allusion to Plato's *Charmides*, 156–157.

35 *DM* IV 2, 184.1–6; III 14. Also see Shaw (2007).

36 Fantasy of ritual acts beautified by art, *Chald. Phil.* II. Projection of divine light, *In Remp.* I 39.9–17. The theurgist as an extension of the gods *In Tim.* I 211.24–28.

A Fire That Descends from the Stars

As indicated above, Platonist theurgy is astrological.[37] Proclus' text on the hieratic art is probably one of the clearest statements about the said astrological fundamental condition of theurgy. Even when theurgists are very critical of astrology as so poorly understood by common practitioners, reduced to a technical, secondary knowledge, theurgy is astrological in a technical sense, since the diverse theurgical practices are supposed to be performed at the appropriate time (καιρός), be it the purifications and initiations, the hymn-singing to the different gods, or the composition, animation and ritual work with them through their living statues, integrating thus the ritual display into the cosmic harmony as an organic expression of it.[38] All the hieratic works are based on the celestial-terrestrial correspondences. As a symbol charged with divine presence, every terrestrial substance used in theurgical practice is the counterpart of a celestial element, which is in turn an intelligible expression originating with the gods. "In heaven are found the terrestrial celestially, in a causal mode and, reciprocally, in the earth are the celestial [things] in a terrestrial manner" (ἐν οὐρανῷ μὲν τὰ κατ' αἰτίαν καὶ οὐρανίως, ἔν τε γῇ τὰ οὐράνια γηΐνως). The palm tree resembles the sun in the same way that the sunflower and the rooster converge or are dynamically compatible (συμπεριπολοῦντα) with the luminary; the

37 A fundamental condition about which, in my opinion and as far as I know, far more discussion is required, and which hopefully may gain a far greater consideration in the histories of astrology, which seem to have focused mainly on certain authors, guided by a conception of astrology only as a technical procedure (a limited conception already criticized by Platonic philosophers!) instead of also considering those that conceived astrology as theurgy; something that includes technical procedures but that essentially goes beyond this. Several scholars, following *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 107, affirm that theurgists rejected astrology completely, something which, if very briefly, I suggest in this paper not to be the case. Although, certainly, theurgists are very critical of the way professional astrologers understand and practice their discipline, which they reduce to a technical procedure of interpreting astral charts instead of understanding it and practicing it theurgically. Cf. *DM* II 11 for Iamblichus' precisions on Porphyry's conception on the theurgical art.

38 Cf. *In Tim.* I 214.7–11; 215.8–16 and specially *De Prov.* 37–39 for a view of Proclus where there seems to be a very fluid relationship between astrological divination and theurgy. Also cf. *DM* VII 4, 267.6–10. In fact, it seems that most magical practices of late antiquity were astrological, in the sense of depending on the right astronomical moment for being done successfully; the *Greek Magical Papyri* are full of divers examples. See also Plotinus' 4th *Ennead*, particularly IV 4 [28], 30 ff. for an exposition of the astrological basis of magical practice.

sun, the sunflower and the rooster moving together coordinately (συγκινεῖται); their lives being linked in some way. It is sympathy that binds together all the orders of the cosmos (τάξις, σειραί) which, presided over by the gods as their guides, stretch from the very first beings to the very last. Angels, demons, souls, animals, plants, minerals, all sharing certain similar living properties, full of the breath (ἐμπνέοντα) emanating from the stars (φοστήρων ἀπόρροιαι); properties which, while being analogously displayed in multiple forms, simultaneously through all the orders of the cosmos, have their unity in a god, all participating in the divine whose presence (παρουσία) embraces it all. "Thus all is full of gods" (οὕτω μεστὰ πάντα θεῶν), repeats Proclus, after the sage Thales.[39]

Though theurgy may be said to be astrological in a technical, secondary sense, primarily it is astrological in a metaphysical sense, the way it may be said that sensible, corporeal experience is the astrological phenomenology of the soul of the cosmos composed by the celestial spheres. Bodies are the results or effects (ἀποτελεσμάτα[40]) of soul's self-creative contemplation and portrayal in the astral dynamics which, according to a *logos*, mediate between the intelligible and the sensible. The participation or causality of the intelligible in the sensible is one of simultaneity, unitary coordination or co-presence (σύμπνοια, Plotinus) the same way that intellection and sensation may be seen to be continuous and simultaneous in the case of the human being.[41] This

39 *On the hieratic art*, 40. Thales, A 22.

40 Hence astrology was known as ἀποτελεσματικὴ. See Porphyry's *Introduction to Ptolemy*, 1.

41 II 3 [52] 7.10–20. In general terms the vision of the cosmos in Neoplatonism is of a unitary whole where there reigns a single harmony or coordination of all. Plotinus will criticize the causality models that, taken to the letter, view in the intelligible the cause of the sensible as a temporal sequence of cause-effect (VI 7 [38] 33). Causality must be understood as inter-dependence, and this is not a doctrine, but a dialectical tool that helps us to think and to understand, against our habits, this relationship. This model Sara Rappe (2000), 37–40 calls "simultaneous arising" (simultaneous manifestation) or also "co-rising" (co-manifestation). Thus indicating that while there is still a sequence of events these are not causal sequences—in the usual sense of the term—but rather, the cause and the effect have a reciprocal origin. Sensible reality, then, appears as an immediate and necessary expression of the intelligible. We can say that the sensible is the co-presence of the intelligible (Plotinus will speak of "simultaneous coordination")—an idea of causation that suggests rather a notion of resonance and sympathy. The relationship between the sensible and the intelligible is central in Neoplatonic thought, that relationship being operated by soul. In the first line of the tractate *On Fate* (III, 1) Plotinus distinguishes between "The things that become and those that are", to begin the questioning regarding the causal relationship among them. "The things that become", or sensible things, for the Neoplatonic tradition, are assimilated symbolically to the terrestrial, and "those that

way, astrological methods, understood in a philosophical context that goes far beyond an understanding of astrology as a technique for interpreting an astronomical figure (σχῆμα), become, for the Platonists, an ethical tool for the ordering of embodied experience, the coordination of sensation and thought—conscious and unconscious, we could say—, the sensible and the intelligible, represented respectively by the earth and the sky, a very, very ancient, already by the time of Proclus, primal mythological image: the intelligible (the sky) and the sensible (the earth) dynamically united by the erotic bonds of soul. The *diadochus* surely was aware of the erotic union of the sky and the earth represented by Zeus and Hera in the famous Homeric passage where the gods passionately make love in the top of Mount Ida, there where sky and earth meet, surrounded by raging clouds of storm, bolts and thunders, after Hera lured Zeus with Aphrodite's girdle (*Il.* XIV 292).

Ethical coordination is based on the imitation (μιμεῖται) of the dialectical cosmological rhythm or nature's coordination—the astonishingly beautiful self-regulation of the cosmos, hence an aesthetical/ethical paradigm, a perpetual living image (a *physiology* for the Platonists, after the *Timaeus*) of the metaphysical eternal dialectical rhythm; a metaphorical ethical exercise for the "cosmization of consciousness" (P. Hadot) based on the application of analogy understood to have not only a discursive reality but mainly a metaphysical one. Theurgists reciprocate natural entities whose living being is imagined or seen with thought as a natural hymn (ὕμνος φυσικός), like the lotus opening his petals like lips singing (ὑμνεῖν) to the rising sun.[42] Proclus, after Plotinus,[43] with his presentation of the chains of orders that extend from the first to the very last beings, all bounded by the henads or gods who express their will through a heavenly *logos* or celestial writing, seems to echo very ancient Babylonian traditions, where the gods have in their hands ropes that bind under their command

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are", or intelligible, assimilated to the celestial, as clearly expressed in Proclus' text on the hieratic art (148.9–11).

42 Octavio Paz comments in *Los hijos del limo*: "Si la analogía hace del universo un poema, un texto hecho de consonancias, también hace del poema un doble del universo, doble consecuencia: podemos *leer* el universo, podemos *vivir* el poema. Por lo primero la poesía es conocimiento; por lo segundo acto", 84. ["If analogy makes of the universe a poem, a text made of consonances, it also makes of the poem a double of the universe, with the double consequence that: we can read the universe, we can live the poem. By the first poetry is knowledge; by the second act."]

43 With whom he seems to maintain an intense dialogue in his works. It is a matter of debate among scholars, but while Proclus directly criticises Plotinus in several respects, at the same time he follows him in his metaphysics in its main, fundamental lines. We know that Proclus wrote an extensive commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads*.

everything in the lower world.[44] For the Platonists the cosmos is the divine temple, adorned with an extraordinary altar, the celestial vault wherein are found the stars, statues of the gods whose eternal act of the creation of the cosmos is a ritual act, led by the demiurgic hierophant, dedicated to the god of gods. The whole cosmos is an eternal liturgical activity.

Astrological methods, particularly regarding the ruler of the astral figure (οἰκοδεσπότης) for the knowledge of the *daimon*, for the Platonists, knowledge of the deity that is leader of the soul, maybe should be further reconsidered and thus provide a very important key to theurgical procedures. Through the insights that this technique could offer, as a preliminary knowledge, at least some pertinent symbols may be gathered for the invocation of the soul's patron deity. Because, while for theurgists proper knowledge of the tutelary goddess or god would mean a direct contact with it and further unification, to pretend to have knowledge about it just through calculations and discourses would be naive.[45] However, as part of a tradition revealed by the gods themselves, from those astrological techniques understood as a preliminary knowledge, will result what may turn out to be significant symbols of the gods, given all the appropriate correspondences of the gods with all the orders and elements of the cosmos, these being the means of contact with them, as revealed by the gods themselves; a communication that would confirm the pertinence (or not) of the symbols; that is, a direct experience of knowledge that would rectify and deepen that known only indirectly, in an imperfect way, through the astrological symbols—imperfect, that is, in comparison with the perfectioning of the soul through the contact and progressive union with its god or divine unity.[46] The soul's divine counterpart, as Iphigenia seemed to be imagined as

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44 It is interesting in this regard that the dictionary gives, for σειρά: rope, chain, noose, bind. Regarding Babylonian celestial divination, see in bibliography Rochberg and Reiner as well as Campion (chapters 3 and 4). Reiner refers to Hephaestion, a Greco-Egyptian astrologer roughly a contemporary of Proclus, as evidence of the continued vitality of Mesopotamian (Chaldean?) divinatory traditions, somehow influencing or still present in the development of late antique astrology (Reiner, 1995, 79). Traditions which are organically integrated with very extensive ritual repertoires of ceremonies that employ the whole network of cosmic and natural correspondences we see in use both in theurgy and in the magical papyri; rituals that included hymn-singing directly to the stars. Cf. *In Crat*. 71.32 where Proclus talks about the hymns to the gods revealed to the Egyptians, the Indians, the Chaldeans and the Greeks. For the astral magic and divination of the Babylonians see Reiner (1995).

45 Cf. *DM* IX 1 for Iamblichus' distinctions regarding how the doctrine of the personal *daimon* is double: theurgical and technical.

46 So while the technical interpretation of astrological symbolism may be imperfect, it

the terrestrial counterpart of Artemis, or as Aphrodite was thought of as Helen's *daimon* in the Homeric vision. Like Socrates, who for Proclus had Apollo for *daimon* (*In Alc.*); or maybe even Proclus himself, who devoutly claimed to belong to Athena in his own hymn to the goddess (VII, 42).

Praying to Become a Divine, Loving Statue

Theurgists prepare statues of the gods while at the same time preparing themselves as statues that receive divine illumination. That is, theurgical work, if it is said to consist in unification, expresses this externally through the mixing together of diverse materials which as signals and symbols correspond to the same god, thus forming a unity assimilated to the pre-existing divine unity,[47] theurgists operating and singing hymns simultaneously in an intelligible, discursive, natural and perceptible manner.[48] The assembling and formation of the said image resembles divine manifestation itself, where formless beings take form for us, who are bounded by form. An anthropomorphism, but not operated by the theurgist but secondarily, being primarily operated by the divinities and their messengers (ἄγγελοι),[49] who move, inspire and teach theurgists when they themselves seek to identify with the former (Proclus uses the

may also be a first step, so to speak; though not a necessary one, since the gods could directly inspire the theurgist as how to proceed without himself having to resort to the investigation of astrological figures, which the so-called "experts" in these matters, the professional astrologers, so superficially understand. Regarding the question of the ruler of the astral figure, see Porphyry's *Introduction to Ptolemy*, 30 and Iamblichus' *DM* IX Cf. PGM XIII 710–730; IV 36–51, and Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III, 10. Also the works of Antiochus of Athens, Paulus Alexandrinus, Hephaestion of Thebes, Firmicus Maternus and the *Liber Hermetis*, for example, regarding the kind of astrological works known by theurgists. We actually have the so-called *Paraphrase of Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* as well as an *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, both attributed to Proclus, an attribution considered dubious by some, though not by all.

47 A procedure analogous to the theological procedure used by Proclus in *P.T.* VI 13. Cf. *E.T.* 67.

48 *On the hieratic art*, 148.13–15. Also on these lines Proclus seems to treat prayer and hymn-singing as synonymous.

49 These messengers, in their kindness, appear to the theurgists (φαίνονται) endowed with form; *On the hieratic art*, 150.8–15, very much in the same way that Proclus refers to the same action done by the gods (Cf. *In Crat*. 31.8–17; *In Remp*. I 39.28–40.4). So perhaps, in a way we can think about the angels as the messages themselves, the forms revealed to us bounded by form.

same term, ἡγεμόνες, as guides, to refer to both gods and theurgists[50]), a union conceived by Proclus as erotic or loving, one of the main analogies used in the text, as already noted.[51] In an example where the philosopher uses another analogy (149, 4–11), the said union is preceded by the warming or preparation of a fit material to be ignited by the loving gods when their fire is transmitted, the same way as when a heated wick is put near a source of heat and without actually touching it catches fire; that is, the ignition, likened to divinization, doesn't depend on a corporeal, external causation but only in a secondary, auxiliary way.[52] This divinization is what theurgy really is; not a technique, which deals with secondary, auxiliary causes, necessary but not sufficient for divinization to happen.[53] Let us not forget that, for the Platonists, the problem of the limited conception of theurgy just as a technique is correlative with the problem of limiting the conception of philosophy just to a rational discursive technique.[54]

Participation in the divine fire is a compassionate activity of the gods to those whom they love and who respond to their love, as was said about Proclus' relationship with Athena.[55] Strictly speaking, the gods themselves suffer no passion but their messengers seem to represent the mutual passion, the *sympatheia* or compassion that unites divinities and theurgists in love. We may compare this with how Furley has advanced the notions of prayer and hymn-singing as part of a system of reciprocal *charis* between gods and humans, being the basis of Greek religion—*charis* or grace (also favor, joy, happiness, delight, etc) being both the gratitude of humans towards the gods as well as the grace or beneficence bestowed by the gods on human beings. A simultaneity and circularity reminiscent of Proclus' notion of prayer (and theurgical activities in general),[56] participation in the divine fire can be thought of as an experience

50 *On the hieratic art* 148.13–15; 150.25.

51 Following Plato's *Symposium*, where the ἱερέων τέχνε are mentioned in Diotima's speech on Eros as the greatest *daimon*, magician and diviner; 202e–203d.

52 Cf. *DM* V 7 and Simplicius, *On Categories* IX 302.28–303.

53 Cf. *DM* IV 2 for what Iamblichus considers are the two aspects we have to differentiate regarding theurgy: as a human activity and as the manifestation of the superior powers which through the divine symbols enlivens human activity.

54 Cf. *DM* II 11.

55 It was the goddess herself that, after communicating with Proclus in a dream, later in her form as a statue went to live at the philosopher's house—the virgin goddess living together with bachelor philosopher (*V. P.* XXX).

56 Seen as an aesthetic offering designed to secure divine beneficence, Furley even speaks of the "charis-drive", also reminiscent of our innate desire to pray and sing hymns to the gods, instilled by the gods themselves, according to Proclus. P. 119. Cf. Iamblichus on how "all superior beings rejoice in the efforts of their inferiors to imitate them"; *DM* VII 1, 250.5–9.

both of knowledge or intelligible illumination as well as of psychological activation, an enlivening intensification or heating, in the same way that in fire we may distinguish between light and heat. Could we say that the simultaneous activity of both is what Proclus calls *the flower of the intellect* and *the flower of the whole soul*?[57] one analogous to the other; the former, while being the first of all our faculties, encompassed by the latter, being the center of our whole essence and of all our faculties around it.[58] The center which coincides with the center in the unification, catalyzed by fervent prayer sung and—probably—danced,[59] animated by a just and pious heart in coordination with an enlightened mind, also described by Proclus as "the supreme limit of true prayer", where we "no longer belong to ourselves but to the gods, remaining in the divine light and encircled in its embrace".[60]

This is an experience that may be envisaged both as simultaneous and cyclical, both an ascent of the human and a descent of the divine. As mentioned at the beginning of this text, in Proclus' complex metaphysics ontology is encompassed by henadology. The realm of being, that which makes the world intelligible, is subordinated to the henads or divine unities—the gods—which, from beyond existence, bind everything together, giving unity to the all. It was said that the henads cannot be just identified as causes, causality belonging to the forms; otherwise we would only have a duplication of the forms. It was also mentioned that for Proclus it is important that we may not only exercise the intellectual part of the soul, but that we may also perfect the divine part through sympathy with the mysteries by a kind of entheastic discourse, not a demonstrative one. A reflection of the twofold metaphysics that seems to permeate the whole of Proclus' approach, as well as being mirrored by the human being ("We are images of intellective essences, but statues of unknown signs"). There is *Silence* and *Logos*,[61] just as the soul is composed both of divine

57 The mind and the heart, put into more simple terms?

58 *Chal. Phil.* IV. For a clarifying and insightful recent discussion of these two terms in relation to the "one in soul" (and with whom I seem to share several perspectives regarding Proclus' theurgy and its philosophical contextualization) see Chlup (2012), 5.1, *The one in soul*, 163–169.

59 Furley stresses this aspect of hymn-singing as present at least in some very important examples documented. On the other hand, Proclus uses the image of soul dancing around intellect in several passages in his works (*In Parm.* 808.7; *In Tim.* I 248, 4; *P.T.* IV 6, 21.2 and IV 13, 43.21) Both in *P.T.* I 3, 16.20–21 and in *In Parm.* 1072.10 it is said that the final goal of soul is to dance around divinity. References were taken from Chlup (2012), 137 n. 1.

60 *In Tim.* I 211.25–212.

61 *Chald. Phil.* V and IV.

symbols and *logoi*; this is also reflected in Proclus' theurgical activity, both in its artistic performance aspect as in the intellectual aspect of it. So, while it has thoughtfully been said that theurgy refers to "an aspect of the Platonist experience that can only be performed, not talked about",[62] could we say that it may be both performed and talked about? Both aspects represented by an understanding of theurgy as an expression of inspiration, of the *maniai*,[63] as much as an enlightened intellectual expression as represented, for example, by the understanding of Plato's *Parmenides* as a sacred text or theological hymn?[64]

As may have been expected from the title of this paper regarding Proclus' theurgical prayers, however, because of space considerations, I have barely referred to the philosopher's own hymns and the very complex intellectual relationship they have with the rest of his work.[65] However I chose this title in order to point out that in Proclus' integral approach to theurgy there is both an intellectual as well as an erotic, incomprehensible element related to an individual intimate experience.[66] My intention with this paper has been only to rehearse an approach, to make suggestions regarding that part which cannot be demonstrated about Proclus' theurgy, that is, that cannot be reduced to demonstrations but nonetheless is central as well. The symbolic aspect of theurgy, as we may call it; a perspective where theurgy is not to be confined as reaching as far as the intelligible-intellective gods only,[67] as an activity of

62 Dillon (2002), 291 [= *supra*, p. 20]. In another place, regarding theurgy, Dillon has said that "in fact, it is really a means of organizing the natural *sympatheia* of the world to concord with the benevolent providence of the gods. It may be viewed, therefore, as a sort of theologized science". Here he also describes Iamblichus' *DM* as a manifesto of "sacramental theology"; Dillon (2010), 374.

63 As in Proclus' most comprehensive definition of theurgy in *Platonic Theology* I 25, 113.7–10: "theurgic power, which is more excellent than all human wisdom (ἀνθρωπίνης σοφροσύνης καὶ ἐπιστήμης), and which comprehends divination's good (μαντικῆς ἀγαθὰ), the purifying powers in the accomplishment of the rites, and in short, all such things as are the effects of divine possession (ἐνθέου κατακωχῆς ἐνεργήματα)".

64 *P. T.* I 8.

65 An aspect that Van den Berg has demonstrated as central for our understanding of Proclus' theurgy.

66 Dillon observes: "It is possible … that the rules of allegory cannot be stated precisely, but must simply be derived from experience—sitting at the feet of one's master- and from personal inspiration". "All I would suggest is that the discerning of the correct analogies had to be learned by experience" (Dillon (1976), 248–249 and 256).

67 As Van den Berg (2001) highlights in his work, limiting the possibility of theurgical ascent up to this level of gods. See *In Crat.* LXXI, 32.29–30; Cf. CXII, 65.25–26. In this passages Proclus refers specifically to the *telestike*.

the flower of the intellect, identified with *the one of the soul* from a demonstrative perspective, the accent being put on the intelligible ascent, but theurgy as union with the gods, in a more poetic and simple but also mysterious way: the entheastic perspective. The mentioned psychological activation, an enlivening intensification or heating, as an activity of *the flower of the whole soul* identified with *the one of the soul* in a more appropriate or basic manner, even if perplexing intellectually, since it seems to refer to an experience where the whole of reality, intelligible and sensible, collapses into unity. Regarding these different but complementary aspects—and as I have insisted, in some senses, simultaneous aspects—of Proclus' theurgy, research has rested, perhaps somewhat excessively, on what has been called the top-down metaphysics of the late Platonists. A too literal reading of this description places the henads right on the top, above all the intelligible hierarchy; apparently out of reach from any theurgical activity.[68] The henads, the same as the One, strictly speaking, seem to have no place in the structure; they are outside the ontological scheme, not being precisely on an ontological level. They can be said to be both above as well as below it, embracing it all around it from its very center; the cryptic description employed at the beginning of this paper. As I understand, the gods, no matter how low, are henads, encosmic henads being the lowest ones, but not literally lowest.[69] Paraphrasing Proclus, the divine is present to all things alike, all the same for the sensible as to the intelligible; actually this distinction collapses in divine unification, so "even if you take the lowest levels of reality, there too you will find the divine present". In a way, it can be said about everything that it has its origin in the gods directly from them, without intermediation, along with the complex process of formal causation. "For not only does the continuous

68 Van den Berg underlines this aspect in his whole approach to Proclus' theurgy, stressing the ascent of soul to *nous* in the philosopher's theurgical hymns. Hence, Proclus' theory of prayer, for Van den Berg, had little influence on his composition of his own hymns, addressed to lower gods. For him we can't compare Proclus' hymns to what he calls his "theory of prayer" (referring to *In Tim.* I 211.9), since "the fact is that the theory of prayer focuses on "perfect and true prayer which culminates in unification on the level of the henads", and the theurgy of the hymns, according to Van den Berg, do not reach that high. But, couldn't it be that "perfect and true prayer" refers to what praying truly and essentially is *any* kind of prayer as long as it is true, therefore, realizing its essence, and not literally a different kind of prayer as that done by the hymns? (89 and his conclusions in this regard, 110–111). In his thorough study Van den Berg does not mention "the flower of the whole soul" in any significant way, as contrasted by Proclus with "the flower of the intellect" in *Chald. Phil.* IV.

69 Cf. *E. T.* 139, on how all the levels participate in divinity, from Being to bodily natures.

procession of entities reach completion as each of them successively obtains its subsistence from its proximate causes,[70] but it is also from the very gods themselves that all things in a sense are generated". Everything is rooted in the gods and, in a mysterious manner, nothing has ever really departed from them. "In a wonderful way, therefore, *all things both have and have not* proceeded forth" (emphasis mine).[71]

I alluded above to both an ascent of the human and a descent of the divine as a simultaneous activity. The ascent begins from the sensible to the intelligible, but then from there to the One it is not exactly a further ascent, but in a way we can say it is a descent, from the divine to the sensible as in the *mania* of possession, something that arises from the body, as is also the case in the experience of beauty. A full cycle is completed in this way. The One being the beginning and end, from the metaphysical perspective the emanative descent from the One would correspond to what from a epistemological and psychological perspective may be seen as the complementary, simultaneous aspect of the ascent, the descent of the divine, the establishment in the One, that which happened "previously" to the ascent and which now manifests itself, but which also, somehow, had always been already established; a permanence that has never changed, that we never really abandoned in the first place, even if we were not aware of it or can't understand it. Perhaps we could also speak *both* of a top-down *and* a from-center-out metaphysics in Proclus—where the lower, ignited by the gods, liberates the divine fire, revealing divinity? This is an expression of the dialectics of love, where, like Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, the loved one becomes a living statue of the god venerated by the lover, a divinization performed by love itself. The body reveals itself as divine, as a medium for the reunion of the lover and the beloved. In the same manner the cosmos, caused by the One, is revealed as its living image, multiplicity being one. The all is the most perfect icon of unity, thus is good, divine. For the late Platonists, for whom unity precedes being, the individuality[72] of a sensible unity reveals its divinity, the sensible unity being its living expression or symbol, by burning in the divine fire kindled by the gods, even as the Demiurge kindled the light of the Sun. For Proclus, as in the astrological tradition, the Sun is analogous to the heart; thus, the image of the Demiurge kindling the light of the Sun is analogous to the image of the god

70 A feature of theurgical ascent that Van den Berg remarks on.

71 *In Tim.* I 209.14–210.3.

72 Butler (2011) has made some important and suggestive observations regarding the relation between the gods and individuality (*idiotes*) as their main characteristic and the basis of their unity.

kindling the divine fire in the heart of the theurgist.[73] Proclus comments about this passage from the *Timaeus* (39b), relating it to when "the souls that are possessed by love and share in the inspiration therefrom, using apparent beauty with vehicle undefiled", that way they are turned towards intelligible beauty, their activity being directed to it; "kindling a light" "for less perfect souls, they elevate this also to the divine and dance with them about the one source of all beauty".[74]

All these extensive considerations that I have been presenting to the reader to ponder, I believe that in some important aspects may relativize contemporary conceptions of theurgy, classified according to different kinds. Basically a lower and a higher type of theurgy, as two different, separated practices, where the material considerations of the theurgists are seen as something low, almost a degrading concern for philosophers.[75] Do we expect to understand and make sense of everything regarding theurgy? Perhaps we could say that it may not be possible, according to Proclus' own philosophical contextualizations?[76] Henads and forms don't seem to quite fit one into the other neatly;

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73 Cf. *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 58 and v. 6 of Proclus' own hymn to Helios (1). See Van den Berg (2001), 158, for his comments on this verse.

74 *In Alc*. 33.11–16. This interpretation by Proclus on the kindling of a light can be compared with the analogy already mentioned, about the proper preparation or "warming" of a fit material to be ignited by the gods when their fire is transmitted, the same way as when a heated wick is put near a source of heat and without actually touching it catches fire (*On the hieratic art*, 149.4–11).

75 For a recent discussion that points to a far more fluid relation between what it has been called lower and higher types of theurgy, as well as between internal and external theurgy, see Chlup (2012), 168–184. Chlup also refers in his work to the exposition of Helmig and Vargas, very valuable too. I do not refer to them directly in this paper since I had the opportunity of reading it after the completion of it; however, I think it is important to mention also this proposition for the re-consideration of theurgy in Proclus and in Platonism in general, pointing to the intimate relationship between the grades of the ascent of the soul and the grades of virtue and freedom developed by ethical practice, pointing both to the unity of philosophy and theurgy, as well as to the internal unity of theurgical practice, in Proclus, something I also aim at in my research. See, Helming, Christoph, y Vargas, Antonio, L.C. "Ascent of the soul and grades of freedom. Neoplatonist Theurgy between Ritual and Philosophy" en *Fate, Providence and Moral responsability in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, editors: Pierce d'Hoine y Gerd Van Riel, Leuven, 2014, 253–266.

76 Which, of course, I don't claim to be representing, but just trying to understand how to rehearse an approach to, as moderate as possible. At this point, and before concluding the paper, I would also like to point to the work of Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013). I do not refer to it directly in the course of my paper since I had access to it after the completion of

they may be said to be proportional but also incommensurable, and yet a unity, which, to add more perplexity, all the same enfolds bodies ("In a wonderful way, therefore, all things both have and have not proceeded forth").[77]

An aspect whose function may be to remain mysterious, a limit that Platonists seemed willing to accept, but not with frustration nor yielding to irrational, decadent superstitions, but with a refined aesthetical sensibility that thinks imaginatively through metaphors, symbols and analogies, at the same time being rationally acknowledged. A rational limit that, in my opinion, all the same raises an ethical question for the researcher in this very same regard. And to deny this aspect, it seems to me, would be already an ethical decision. According to Marinus, it appears that Proclus himself didn't intellectually conceive all his theurgical activities according to a rational scheme of development but also with his heart being ignited by the gods, as when he, out of nowhere, uttered in a loud voice an inspired poetic improvisation:

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it. However, I think it is important to point to this recent and admirable, very extensive and meticulous research on theurgy (I have the opportunity to do so during the very final corrections before the publication of this paper), since it makes some important critical remarks to be kept in mind by current research, demanding more historical and chronological precision against what she considers ideal reconstructions of Neoplatonist theurgy. Tanaseanu-Döbler bases her work on a thorough analysis of the terminology used by the different ancient authors in their different works to refer to what we commonly consider as theurgy, making rigorous distinctions regarding those who, on the other hand, are all labelled "pagans". Very briefly put, she sees theurgy as an esoteric ritual *techne*, or as an esoteric religious knowledge, about which we cannot know anything regarding its practical aspect (if there ever was one, as she questions), but only about its theory; that is, for Tanaseanu-Döbler, theurgy is a written, literary tradition, sort of an invention by philosophers. In my opinion, there seems to be a lack of a more dialectical understanding in her analysis about the relationship between philosophy and theurgy, as expressed by the philosophers themselves; more specifically, regarding the relationship between ritual and contemplation and between ascent and cultic practice (also, about the relationship between theurgy and other hieratic traditions, Greek and non-Greek), all this terms opposed in a sort of dualist manner; hence, she talks of *parallelism* (different from what we propose here as *simultaneity*), neglecting the emphasis on unity on the part of the philosophers. However, this is not the place for a full, in-depth analysis of Tanaseanu-Döbler valuable work.

77 As Chlup observes, from the point of view of the forms it makes no sense to link the Sun, the lion, the cock and the lotus, as Proclus does in his text on the hieratic art (131. Cf. *On the hieratic art* 149.15–20; 150.9–19). Their unity or commonality "is not perceived through argument proceeding from effect to cause; it is the perception of a *sympathy*", Henry Corbin also observed this regarding Proclus' text (106).

> My soul has come, breathing the might of fire,
> And, opening the mind, to the aether in a fiery whirl
> It rises, and clamours immortally for the starry orbits.[78]

There are some categorizations that may help us understand the relationship of philosophy and theurgy when thought of as a pair of opposites in dialectical relationship forming a unity, classifications meant only as a heuristical device that are not to be abused, as seems the case with the opposition between philosophers and theurgists in the well- known distinction of Damascius;[79] an opposition which seems to have been taken rather dogmatically and in a sort of dualist conception of the same in modern studies. Could we think of the distinction, in the works of the Platonists, between Pythagoreanism and Orphism, divination and magic, contemplation and possession, positive and negative theology and, above all, the images of Apollo and Dionysus, as analogous to the dialectical distinction between philosophy and theurgy? Perhaps the comparison of these last two divine images, not only with the aspects of Proclus' thought that have been presented, but with the distinction Plotinus makes between the two faces of the intellect, one aspect, sober, beautiful and harmonious, the other mad, drunk with ecstasy, could prove fruitful.[80] Again, as expressions of both a visible, manifest aspect of reality and of an invisible (meaning unknowable), unmanifest aspect that, somehow, can only be felt and imagined by a kind of madness—a *rational madness*, though. Two facets which, to conclude, may be said to have been mirrored in Proclus' own life, in his daily activities, arranged according to the Sun's daily cycle, its main stations marked by Proclus by rituals and prayers (at sunrise, mid-day and sunset[81]), working on his texts during the day, dedicating himself to oral teachings in the afternoon. Proclus, in the image presented by Marinus, is a bright intellect and a

78 *V.P.* XXVIII. Translation taken from Edwards (2000).

79 "To some, philosophy is primary, as to Porphyry and Plotinus and a great many other philosophers; to others, hieratic practice, as to Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and the hieratic school generally." Damascius, *Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* II, I, 172.

80 VI 7, 35. Cf. *In Crat.* CXXXIII.

81 *V.P.* XXII. Cf. *On the hieratic art* 150, 9–12 where Proclus explains how the presence of solar symbols is very strong and evident, given how it does seem to perceive the solar period, singing to the Sun when it rises and reaches the other κέντρα or angles (those marking mid-day and sunset), an astrological technical term, like several others in the text. For the special theurgical role of the Sun, see for example Van den Berg's introduction to his commentary on Proclus' hymn to Helios; 145.

pious burning heart, hierophant of the whole world,[82] considered as an image of a divine man (θείων ἀνδρῶν εἰκόνας[83]), a radiant, solar living statue, whose death was signaled by a couple of solar eclipses, before and after his decease, the heavens indicating what would happen in the earth in the absence of his warm light.

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82 *V.P.* XIX. In this paragraph Marinus talks about the different ritual prescriptions and celebrations to the gods of diverse cultures that Proclus celebrated by singing hymns. "For one maxim that this most godfearing philosopher had always at hand and was always uttering was that a philosopher ought not to worship in the manner of a single city or the country of a few people, but should be the common priest of the entire world." Cf. this with Plotinus' remark to Porphyry, as transmitted by the same in his *Life of Plotinus* (15.5): "You have proved yourself simultaneously a poet, a philosopher and a teacher of sacred truth (*hierophantes*)". By analogy we can also point to this remark in relation to what was called, as a hermeneutical suggestion, *a simultaneous unity of a plurality of perspectives*.

83 *On the hieratic art* 150.17.

——— (2002), 'The Platonic Philosopher at Prayer', in Th. Kobusch, M. Erler (eds.), *Metaphysik und Religion. Zur Signatur des spätantikern Denkens*, München—Leipzig, 279–295 [reprinted in this volume, pp. 7–25].

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Damascius and Dionysius on Prayer and Silence

Marilena Vlad

Speaking about God, speaking to God, or inviting to silence in front of God: these three manners of speech intertwine throughout the Neoplatonic discourse about the divine. My paper explores the way in which prayer and silence are articulated in the discourse of Damascius and Dionysius the Areopagite. This analysis is meant to prove that, despite certain similarities, these two authors had rather different understandings of the divine, as well as different manners of searching for it.

Damascius' Silence and the Prayer for Forgiveness

Following the example of most Neoplatonic writers, Damascius invokes the gods when engaging in problems concerning the divinity itself.[1] In his treatise *On the first principles* (*De principiis*), it is striking to see that he invokes the gods differently, when it comes to the ineffable, on the one hand, or to the One and the unified, on the other hand.

In as far as the unified (or the intelligible being) is concerned, Damascius invokes the gods for two main reasons: he hopes that the gods will guide him to the truth,[2] he needs their help in his endeavour,[3] but he is also asking for their tolerance regarding the conceptions he exposes, which, he reckons, are

1 Neoplatonic thinkers follow in this Plato, who addressed prayers to the Gods before discussing subjects of particular importance: see Plato, *Timaeus*, 27c1–d1; 48d4–e1; *Philebus*, 25b8–10, 48d4–e2, *Critias*, 106a3–b7, *Laws*, IV, 712b4, X, 893b1–5, *Epinomis*, 980c4–5. Proclus invokes the gods because he thinks it is only through their help that we can understand anything about the divine; only gods can light in us the light of truth when it comes to knowing gods: see *Platonic Theology*, I 1, 7.21–8.4; III 1, 6. 4–7; *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, I 617.1–4; *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, I 214.26–216.18. See also Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV, 9 [8], 4.6–7, V, 1 [10] 6.9–12 and Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, I 1, 5.4–9.

2 Damascius, *De principiis*, Westerink II 128. 6: "may God lead us to the truth" (θεὸς δὲ ἄγοι πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν). We use the translation of Sara Ahbel-Rappe (Damascius' *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, Oxford, 2012), but we operate the modifications required by our analysis.

3 *De principiis*, W. II 69. 14–17: "Let us reply, first invoking God to help us and to excuse [συγγνῶναι] our discourse, which constantly strives for the single truth of those realities, but is distracted through its native weakness by different conceptions on various occasions."

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feeble, both in their content and in their expression.[4] For Damascius, the very condition of discursiveness makes us go astray and lose our grip on the divine truth. Thus, even though he places his discourse under the favour of the gods, the discourse itself remains inevitably human, and Damascius prays the gods to forgive the inherent limits of his discourse. He feels there is a distance between the truth as known by gods and what the discourse can render about the principles (thus, about the gods), in an imperfect and inadequate way.

Dealing with the One—a principle even more difficult to know—, Damascius also invokes the gods. He realizes that, in fact, the One seems to be inaccessible to knowledge, which remains dual. Damascius deploys a series of aporiai concerning the fact that the One can or cannot be known. At the end, he concludes that only the gods know the truth on this matter.[5] This time, it is not just the expression and the feebleness of our conceptions that is problematic (as in the case of the unified), but the very possibility of knowing anything about the One. It is difficult to decide even if the One can in any way be known or if it is completely unknowable. Only the gods could eventually answer such a question with some certainty. Damascius, however, pushes the aporetical investigation even further, and he even doubts that the god united with the absolute One could really know the One, since knowledge implies a certain duality.[6] Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of the subject matter, Damascius decides that we too should follow the gestations in us (τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν ἀρρήτους ὠδῖνας),[7] as far as the gods and our strength permit us to know.[8] Thus, he relies on the power of our own mind, but also on the help of divine providence. Later on, he explicitly asks for the help of the gods in order to get to the end of the aporiai concerning the One: "With these problems facing us, let us continue the

4 *De principiis*, W. II 51. 9–15: "I pray (παρακαλῶ) the gods for their forgiveness for the weakness of these conceptions and still more for weaknesses of style. Without either the counterthrust of dialectic or the necessity of metaphorical language, we could in no way even indicate anything concerning the highest principles. May this receive favor from the gods! (Τὰ μὲν δὴ τῶν Θεῶν οὕτως ἵλεα γένοιτο)".

5 *De principiis*, W. I 75. 17–20: "So much for arguments denying the possibility of return to the One by means of knowledge. Who then could adjudicate the arguments that clash with each other about matters of such consequence? The gods themselves know the most certain truth regarding them". See also *De principiis*, W. II 212. 17: "The gods alone would know the truth".

6 *De principiis*, W. I 20. 1–4.

7 *De principiis*, W. I 16. 14.

8 *De principiis*, W. I 75. 21–76. 2: "But nevertheless we too must make an effort to accomplish the aporetical gestations, to the extent that divine providence and our own ability provide for the truth being sought".

argument, taking up the question from the beginning, here enlisting the aid of a saving deity (οἷον καὶ ἐνταῦθα σωτῆρα παρακαλέσαντες)".[9]

But what is the most surprising is how Damascius invokes the gods in the first part of his treatise, which concerns the highest principle: the ineffable. Here, prayer comes in only at the end of his analysis. This time, however, Damascius is not expecting help, but *forgiveness*, for he knows that he had gone too far with his daring in speaking about the ineffable: "concerning such a nature, indeed, the audacity (προπέτεια)[10] of our discourse finds its limit, asking for forgiveness (συγγνώμην αἰτοῦσα) from the gods for this venturesome zeal".[11] Thus, the gods could help, when it comes to the One or to the unified, but they seem to be offended by the audacity of speaking about the ineffable.

The discourse on the ineffable ends up with a paradoxical assertion and suppression of the ineffable itself: Damascius says the principle is so ineffable, that it cannot even be called "ineffable".[12] The ineffability is stressed by the very fact of suppressing this attribute, thus driving the principle completely out of the reach of discourse.[13] Nevertheless, Damascius speaks about the ineffable, defying the Platonic tradition, which preferred to keep silence on this subject. In fact, Damascius turns the "negative" warning of the tradition—coming from Plotinus and Proclus, who said there is nothing above the One—into a "positive" warning, if we may call it that: he thinks that above the One *is* the "nothing" itself, the "not even One" (οὐδὲ ἕν), or the ineffable (ἀπόρρητον). Damascius takes for his absolute principle the name of the secret itself from the initiatory rites: the ineffable, the unspeakable one, that on which it is forbidden and even impossible to speak. Therefore, it would have been pointless to ask for the help of the gods in order to speak about that on which the gods forbid speech. Moreover, he argues that Plato knew of the existence of the ineffable, but, following the old custom, he preferred to suggest it through silence, rather

9 *De principiis*, W. I 109. 19–21. Damascius follows here Plato's expression from the *Timaeus*, 48d4–e1, where Plato too asks for the help of the gods.

10 Damascius refers to the hastiness of his discourse, the fact that he is rushing in to speak about something of which one should not speak at all. Thus, προπέτεια indicates here an inconsiderate rush, rather than cowardice, as Sara Ahbel-Rappe translates it.

11 *De principiis*, W. I 61. 4–6.

12 *De principiis*, W. I 61. 1–6: οὕτως ἀπόρρητον ὡς [...] μηδὲ ἀπόρρητον.

13 See Gerd van Riel, "Damascius", in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2011, vol. II, p. 677: "Thus, the ineffability of the First is not just a token of our ignorance, it is rather an expression of our 'super-ignorance' (*huperagnoia*, *Princ*. 1.84.18): an ignorance for the description of which even the terms of ignorance or ineffability are deficient".

than through discourse.[14] And the gods would have favoured Plato's attitude. Damascius, however, wants to go beyond the One, disturbing the silence concerning the absolutely inexpressible, making of it the object of his discourse, despite Plato's caution, despite the warning of the gods and of the tradition.

Why does he do that, knowing that the gods might not tolerate such a daring step? In fact, his goal is not to render the ineffable speakable, but rather to speak about its very unspeakability. He is trying to make the difference between what we can still express, and what is completely incomprehensible through discourse. Thus, he argues that the One is still expressible through its relation to the plurality of the all, inasmuch as the One is non-plural. As such, the One can still be spoken of, though we cannot describe it in our dualist mode of knowledge: "So the One is in a way expressible and in a way inexpressible, while the other [the ineffable] should be honored through a perfect silence and, prior to that, through a perfect unknowing that disdains all knowledge".[15]

While the One is inexpressible through its simplicity, but expressible through its relation to plurality, the ineffable is completely unutterable, as is proven by the paradoxical character of our attempt to express it, and by the aporiai into which this attempt pushes us. No knowledge—direct or indirect—can grasp it, but we can only honour it through our unknowing and through silence. Thus, Damascius breaks the traditional silence, only in order to impose a different kind of silence: an "active" one, imposed by the impossibility of expressing the principle in any way.[16] However, he wants to prove this inexpressibility through discourse and by means of discourse: he shows that, whenever we try to indicate the absolute principle, discourse itself is overturned. Thus, to say that the principle is unknowable implies knowing something about it, or, if it really was unknowable, we wouldn't even know this about it; likewise, to say that it is ineffable is still to speak about it. The ineffable shows itself through this very impossibility of determining it, through the constant overturning of

14 *De principiis*, W. I 9. 16–18: "If, having reached the One, Plato kept silent, it is because he thought it adequate to maintain a complete silence on the completely inexpressible things, following the old habit". The old habit of which Damascius speaks in this context could be that of the Pythagoreans (see Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, §§ 104–105). As for keeping silent, see Plato, *Letters*, II 312d7–e1, 314c1–7; VII 341c9–d6; *Timaios*, 28c5, 53d; *Parmenides*, 136d–e.

15 *De principiis*, W. I 11. 14–16: Τὸ μὲν δὴ ἓν οὕτω ῥητὸν καὶ οὕτως ἄρρητον· ἐκεῖνο δὲ παντελεῖ σιγῇ τετιμήσθω, καὶ πρότερόν γε παντελεῖ ἀγνοίᾳ τῇ πᾶσαν γνῶσιν ἀτιμαζούσῃ.

16 See William Franke, "Of the Ineffable: Aporetics of the Notion of an Absolute Principle", *Arion*, 12.1, 2004, pp. 19–39, which characterizes Damascius' thinking as "apophatic writing, or as a writing of silence" (p. 22).

the discourse, which Damascius pursues to the limit. He deliberately provokes this overturning of the discourse, showing that there is no way we could ever say anything about the principle. Any affirmation or negation about it proves to be inconsistent. Eventually, the principle shows itself through this very impossibility to determine it: "The complete overturning of discourse (ἡ πάντη περιτροπὴ τῶν λόγων) and of thought is the demonstration imagined by us for that of which we are speaking. For what will be the limit of the discourse, if not helpless silence (σιγῆς ἀμηχάνου) and the confession of not knowing anything about these things on whose knowledge it is not allowed to enter, since they are inaccessible?".[17]

In fact, the limit of discourse will be the prayer for forgiveness, Damascius' own testimony that discourse cannot comprehend the principle, and that silence imposes itself after all. Yet, this time, silence bears in it all this discursive effort, the gestation of our thinking in the search for the principle, which is at every time reversed. The discourse will eventually be bound to embrace silence: "rather, starting from the things which can be completely expressed and which can be known by perception, we shall proceed to the things above, and we shall draw the gestations of truth into the harbor of the silence surrounding it [the ineffable] (εἰς τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ σιωπὴν καθορμιοῦμεν τὰς τῆς ἀληθείας ὠδῖνας)".[18]

Thus, Damascius breaks the silence concerning the unknown, only in order to prove and to reinforce it: he wants to turn the old habit of not speaking into a philosophical proof of the unspeakable and of this "extraordinary silence" (σιγῆς ἀμηχάνου)[19] surrounding the principle, protecting it from any indiscreet access.[20] If he asks for forgiveness for having broken the silence, yet, the silence he imposes through this discursive detour is even more unbreakable: we are convinced, through the discursive experience, that the principle is unspeakable, that there is a kind of silence proper to the principle, and that we can only get to perceive it through the *aporiai* in our discourse about it.[21] Thus,

17 *De principiis*, W. I 21. 18–22.

18 *De principiis*, W. I 27, 7–10.

19 *De principiis*, W. I 11.15.

20 The principle is a sanctuary surrounded by silence, thus being even more inaccessible than the silence itself, which surrounds it (τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ σιωπήν). See *De principiis*, W. I 27. 9.

21 In this sense, Laurent Lavaud ("L'ineffable et l'impossible: Damascius au regard de la déconstruction", *Philosophie*, 96, 2007, pp. 46–66) distinguishes two types of silence: the simple limit of discourse, and the silence surrounding the principle: "Le silence qui est 'la limite du discours' (*peras tou logou*) et simple 'aveu d'inconnaissance' n'est donc pas absolument identifiable au 'sanctuaire inaccessible de ce silence extraordinaire' propre

Damascius breaks the human, reverent silence imposed by habit, in order to discover this other silence, which is really unbreakable, and can only be perceived through the *aporiai*. There are two silences facing each other in Damascius' perspective: on the one hand, the silence that surrounds the ineffable like a harbour (τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ σιωπήν)—which we discover through our own inability to actually utter anything about the ineffable—and the silence through which, eventually, we should honour the principle.[22] Damascius prays the gods for forgiveness for having broken this second silence of ours, in order to discover and to ascertain the first silence, which envelops the principle and which is the ultimate reason why we should keep silence. The silence surrounding the principle is not identical with our silence, because it is not a purely discursive silence, a simple suppression of discourse, but it is rather the condition of unspeakability that we discursively discover before we even get to the principle itself.

Whether this "extraordinary silence" really belongs to the principle[23] is a debatable subject. We are definitely far from the trivial level of silence. Nevertheless, this silence is still different from the principle itself. For Damascius, the silence concerning the principle is simply around it, and all that our discourse can grasp is this non-discursive silence (non-discursive inasmuch as it doesn't stand in opposition to a certain discourse, like our silence). The principle itself remains beyond silence, and therefore, we cannot even attribute this silence to it. In fact, this silence—into which our discourse is forced to stop, as into a harbour—surrounds the principle, protecting it from any intrusion. Therefore, we can reach the harbour of silence, but not the principle that the silence surrounds.

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au principe: le silence du pur principe ineffable en effet ne saurait être la simple limite négative du discours, ce qui impliquerait une nouvelle fois de le relier à l'autre que lui, mais il demeure en lui-même, à distance aussi bien du discours qui tente de le dire que du silence qui est simple double négatif du discours. […] Il n'en demeure pas moins que la percée vers ce 'silence extraordinaire' du principe ne se fait qu'au sein même de la parole." (p. 53). See also Joseph Combès, "Négativité et procession des principes chez Damascius", *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 22, 1976, pp. 114–133, especially p. 106.

22 Damascius, *De principiis*, w. I 11. 14–16. See also *De principiis*, w. I, 21. 18–22.

23 This is the perspective defended by Salvatore Lilla ("Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, Porphyre et Damascius", in Ysabel de Andia (ed.), *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, Paris, 1997, p. 144): "Pour Denys comme pour Damascius, l'ignorance et le silence ne se limitent pas à caractériser l'attitude de l'intelligence humaine à l'égard de la *monè* de Dieu ou de l'ineffable, mais personnifient aussi le premier principe". In this connection, the author cites the passage from *De principiis*, w. I 84. 19–21, concerning the One, which remains in the sanctuary of the silence around the ineffable.

The One itself—which is "closest to this principle" (ἐγγυτάτω γὰρ ὂν τῆς ἀμηχάνου ἀρχῆς)—remains hidden in this silence as in a sanctuary.[24] Therefore, we can assume that this silence itself is "close" to the ineffable, but not the ineffable itself. This silence is discovered through the very experience that we have in face of the ineffable: the fact that any approach to it is overturned. This aporetical silence is the last "expression" of the inexpressible, the last sanctuary of the principle which is nowhere and nothing.

Dionysius' Prayer to Get to Silence

If Damascius courageously engages in a solitary discourse about silence, for which he cannot even ask the help of the gods, Dionysius also directs his discourse towards this preeminent silence, but he proceeds differently: he intends to actually *reach* the divine silence through the discourse, and he asks God's help for this. In the opening prayer of the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius prays God to "Lead us up (ἴθυνον ἡμᾶς) beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of mystic scripture, where the mysteries of God's Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence (κατὰ τὸν ὑπέρφωτον ἐγκεκάλυπται τῆς κρυφιομύστου σιγῆς γνόφον)".[25]

This is not a silence from our human perspective; it is not simply our own silence and impossibility to speak about God, but it is God's own silence, the darkness of silence in which God hides himself, and under which are covered the absolute mysteries of theology. Dionysius prays to actually have access to this silence. Moreover, for Dionysius, this silence and the mysteries that it hides are the subject of the mystical writings, and, under God's guiding, he wants to expose them, to talk about them. He no longer feels that it would somehow be inappropriate to break into this silence and to speak about the "superunknowable peak"[26] (ὑπεράγνωστον κορυφήν) of the mystical writings. He

24 *De principiis*, w. I 84. 19–21.

25 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, I 1, 141. 2–142. 2. For the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, we use the translation made by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, New York, 1987; we also indicate the references of the Greek edition: *Corpus Dionysiacum I*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla and *Corpus Dionysiacum II*, ed. G. Heil and A.M. Ritter, Berlin, New York, 1990–1991.

26 Salvatore Lilla ("Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, Porphyre et Damascius", in Ysabel de Andia (ed.), *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en orient et en occident*, Paris, 1997, p. 144) notices that "super-unknowable" (ὑπεράγνωστον) is also the term through which Damascius indicated our attitude in face of the absolute principle, that remains unknown: we not only

no longer hesitates to talk about the unnameable and unknowable God, but, on the contrary, he even asks God to help him do this.[27]

There are a few questions that can be raised is this context. First of all, how can Dionysius talk about the super-unknowable and about the silence that embraces it? How can he expose the names of the nameless, as he pretends? Then, how can he reach silence, precisely through discourse? What is the sense of this mystically-hidden silence, and how can God himself lead us to silence? Furthermore: Dionysius prays God to lead him to the silence which encompasses the mysteries of theology; but, in fact, it is precisely through prayer that he thinks he will be led to this silence, to God's presence and to union with God.[28] But how can prayer make us present to God and unite us to him? And what kind of prayer can do this?

In order to answer all these questions, we need to understand what it means for Dionysius to talk about God. The divine names he exposes are not proper descriptions of God; rather, they are prayers and praises. They make up a hymn addressed to God, inasmuch as God is the cause of everything. While Proclus considered that the first hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides* is the only adequate hymn for the absolute principle,[29] and Damascius says that the ineffable cannot even be praised through a hymn,[30] Dionysius considers that God must be praised through every being, as well as through the negation of everything, thus exceeding the first two Platonic hypotheses in *Parmenides*:[31] "Since God

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are ignorant of it, but we have a super-ignorance if it (ὑπεράγνοια); cf. *De principiis*, w. I, 84. 18.

27 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names*, I 1, 107. 4–108. 5.

28 *Divine Names*, III 1, 138. 8–9: "if we invoke it [the Trinity] with prayers that are holy, with untroubled mind, with a suitability for union with God, then we are surely present to it". See also *Divine Names*, III 1, 139. 13–15: "That is why we must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God. We will not pull down to ourselves that power which is both everywhere and yet nowhere, but by divine reminders and invocations we may commend ourselves to it and be joined to it." For the necessity of prayer as a means towards union with God, see for instance Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis. L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*, Leiden, New York, Köln, 1996, pp. 242–249.

29 Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, VII 1191. 34–35; *Platonic Theology*, II 11, 65.5–15.

30 *De principiis*, w. I 4, 17: σχολῇ γε ἄρα πάντα αὐτὴν ὑμνητέον· οὐδ' ὅμως ὑμνητέον. For Damascius, it is only the silence at the end of this hypothesis, which can still suggest the principle; the hypothesis itself leads us ineffably to the ineffable, of which nothing can be said.

31 In the first, negative hypothesis (*Parmenides*, 137c4–142a8), the One is not plural and therefore doesn't receive any attribute from the plural things. In the second, affirmative hypothesis (*Parmenides*, 142b1–155e3), the One is described through the attributes of

is the cause of all things, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being. Now, we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion".[32] From Dionysius' viewpoint, there is no longer a strict opposition between the first hypothesis in *Parmenides* and the second one: in fact, God can receive all the attributes (surpassing by far the number of attributes discussed in the Platonic hypotheses) and all possible negations.[33]

To pray is to invoke and to remember God, praising him through any possible name, be it affirmative or negative.[34] Prayer doesn't come in at the end of the philosophical endeavour, but the very beginning of the discourse about God must be prayer.[35] Moreover, the discourse as a whole is a prayer,[36] inasmuch as it is a constant remembering of God through his names, and a constant attempt to elevate oneself towards the union with God.[37] In fact, Dionysius himself

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plural things, like whole and parts, beginning, end and middle, rest and motion, equality and inequality, time, etc.

32 *Mystical Theology*, I 2, 143. 3–7; see also *Divine Names*, I 5, 117. 11–13: "And yet, since it is the underpinning of goodness, and by merely being there is the cause of everything, to praise this divinely beneficent Providence you must turn to all of creation".

33 See for instance *Divine Names*, II 10 and *Mystical Theology*, V. Jean-Yves Leloup describes this type of negation—present in the IVth and Vth chapter of the *Mystical Theology*—as "abrasive logics": "Il s'agit d'une logique abrasive qui se détruit elle-même, qui nous laisse sans appui, ni sensible ni conceptuel ou imaginal." (*Un obscure et lumineux silence*, Paris, 2013, chapter "Une logique abrasive", p. 80).

34 God has all possible names; see *Divine Names*, I 7, 119. 10–13: "And so it is that as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is. Truly he has dominion over all and all things revolve around him, for he is their cause, their source, and their destiny. He is 'all in all,' as scripture affirms". In fact, God's names are countless; see for instance *Divine Names*, XII, 1, p. 224. 2, where Dionysius wants to praise God which is of infinite names (ὑμνητέον ἡμῖν τὸν ἀπειρώνυμον).

35 *Divine Names*, III 1, 139. 13: "That is why we must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God" (Διὸ καὶ πρὸ παντὸς καὶ μᾶλλον θεολογίας εὐχῆς ἀπάρχεσθαι χρεών).

36 Rebecca Coughlin ("Theurgy, Prayer, Participation, and Divinization in Dionysius the Areopagite", *Dionysius*, 24, 2006, pp. 149–171) argues that "the text of the *Divine Names* itself is not *about* prayer, but rather it *is* prayer. It is itself a participation in the very process, together with baptism, the eucharist, and the sacrament of myron, through which we become theurgic and enter into the activity of the divine life in which the conceptual and sensible are taken up and united." (p. 169).

37 See for instance Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Intro-*

tells us that the aim of his treatise on the divine names is to become present to God, invoking him "with prayers that are holy",[38] and to unite and entrust ourselves to the Trinity, "by divine reminders and invocations".[39] Thus, naming God eventually means remembering, invoking and praying God, in order to become present to him, to entrust ourselves and to unite us to him.[40]

For Dionysius, however, prayer is not the simple fact of addressing and praising God, but it is a certain kind of discourse, in which an adequate relationship to God can build itself. Prayer is that precise discourse in which God's presence can become manifest to us. Thus, in order to understand what prayer is for Dionysius, we have to enter the details of this discourse about God, and see how it serves to make us aware of God's presence.

Dionysius attributes all possible names to God; yet, in doing so, he doesn't speak about the unknown and unspeakable, but, on the contrary: he actually suspends all predication and knowledge. Thus, in order to predicate a certain attribute, we need at least one name, indicating the thing to which we refer. But, when all possible names are both attributed and denied, what they actually refer to remains completely undetermined, because there is no other name left to define it. Dionysius practices a "total discourse": all names must be affirmed about God, but, if God is absolutely everything, this implies that he is nothing in particular (αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδέν),[41] and that all names must be negated of

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duction to Their Influence, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1993: "Prayer as a coming into God's presence is anagogically interpreted in terms of an upward movement [...] prayer does not change God or pull God down into our presence, but rather changes and elevates us" (p. 145).

38 *Divine Names*, III 1, 138. 2: ὅταν αὐτὴν ἐπικαλούμεθα πανάγνοις μὲν εὐχαῖς.

39 *Divine Names*, III 1, 139. 15: ταῖς θείαις μνήμαις καὶ ἐπικλήσεσιν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐγχειρίζοντας αὐτῇ καὶ ἑνοῦντας.

40 Christian Schäfer (*The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, Brill, 2006) considers that the third chapter of the *Divine Names* is as such a prayer: "Chapter 3 is a prayer, in its main parts, and should be taken as a spiritual preparation for the treatment of the Names in the ten following chapters" (p. 76). This is however not the only prayer in the *Divine Names*. In fact, we can distinguish two senses of prayer: on the one hand, there are the passages that Dionysius himself presents as prayers, in which he explicitly asks something from God or addresses God in a specific prayer language (See Rebecca Coughlin, "Theurgy, Prayer, Participation ...", pp. 169–170, who identifies these passages). On the other hand, inasmuch as all the divine names are invocations of God, as Dionysius explains (*Divine Names*, III 1), we can consider that the whole treatise acquires the sense of a prayer, rather than that of a distinct exposition about God.

41 *Divine Names*, I 5, 117. 4.

him.[42] Therefore, this "total discourse" is at the same time a non-discourse, because, by saying and suppressing everything, it doesn't say anything in particular any more, and it doesn't leave room for any object of speech.

Though all names both refer to God and are denied of God, they no longer speak about God. The relevance of this type of discourse lies not so much in its content, in the precise names Dionysius chooses to discuss, but in its completeness,[43] in the fact that God should be praised through everything. Each name taken separately is inadequate to God—and this is why it will finally be suppressed—, but the discourse in its exhaustiveness is adequate inasmuch as it results in the surpassing of the predication and of discursiveness. Thus, God is everything, but not in the usual logic of predication; he is not everything the way everything is, or the way all things are; he is not the sum of every possible feature. On the contrary, when applied to God, names no longer convey any information about him (since every attribute is negated: both the affirmative and the negative ones), but they indicate the simple fact of God's being there before anything else is, prior to any distinction between things. Used for God, all names indicate a state of being present in everything, before being distinct from any other thing. About God, no name is either affirmed or denied so as to give us any particular knowledge. God is not one thing among others, but rather he is what things are before they get to be specific things,

42 Affirmations and negations work together in Dionysius' discourse, even though negations are said to be more appropriate than affirmations (see *Mystical Theology*, I, 2). In fact, they are more appropriate when we reach a higher level of contemplation, of union with God, but they never overrule the affirmations altogether. See for instance Paul Rorem (*Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Toronto, 1984, pp. 87–90, "The Context of Negative Theology"): "the picture of a continuum of descending affirmations arranged in a relative order and their mirror image in a continuum of ascending negations suggests that affirmations and negations are not independent of each other but rather are two ways of viewing the very same thing" (p. 89).

43 Denys Turner notices: "No partial, restricted vocabulary is adequate to express the inadequacy of theological language; only language under the requirement to say everything possible can do this. It is in the profusion of our affirmations that we encounter the limits of language" (*The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 32). Yet, what is at stake for Dionysius is not only to prove the inadequacy of the discourse, but, more than that: what really matters is to find out a way in which we can still refer to God, once we know that we cannot describe him through anything. The completeness of the discourse serves this purpose: it doesn't describe God, but it suggests his indescribable presence, as the presence of the one to whom the discourse is addressed.

different from each other, before they can be known as specific things, in the logic of affirmations opposing negations.

This kind of discourse—which doesn't describe anything and which, after all, is not a proper discourse at all—has a double effect. On the one hand, it puts God outside the predicative manner in which we approach all objects of thought. On the other hand, it puts us in a non-discursive attitude towards God, because we discover that God's unknowing can only be grasped through an effort of abandoning our abilities to know anything.[44] The divine names—in this complete, exhaustive order—are not describing God, but they are rather meant to make us see beyond any distinction between things, beyond any predication of a determined thing. Starting from any thing, Dionysius indicates this indescribable being, which is neither identical, nor different from anything. God can be present in any particular thing—while particular things are not necessarily present to it[45]—because God precedes the logic of mutually distinct things; he can be found in any particular being, because he precedes the particularity of that being. God's presence in every thing is discovered through this constant effort of naming the non-distinction and non-determination that lies in everything. Thus, prayer—this "total discourse", as we may call it—actually turns all names into invocations of that which can no longer be identified as such: the undetermined cause of everything.[46] Prayer is not description, predication, or simple praise, but passage from the diversity of names in which our thinking usually works, to the consciousness of that which all names eventually name, above their mutual opposition and limitation.

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44 In this respect, Charles M. Stang speaks about an "apophatic anthropology", consisting in the fact that: "the self is progressively unsaid [...] The way of negation is then a practice of transforming the self so that it can best solicit union with the unknown God. [...] We divest ourselves of our dearest faculties and categories in hope of 'being uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow'" (see "Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym", in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.), *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 16. See also: "'No longer I'. The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite", in *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*, Oxford, 2012, pp. 153–196). Yet, we would like to suggest that it is not negation alone that leads to this result, but rather the double discourse, both affirmative and negative, through which predication is banned even stronger than through negation.

45 *Divine Names*, III 1, 138. 7: "The Trinity is present to all things, though all things are not present to it (Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ μὲν ἅπασι πάρεστιν, οὐ πάντα δὲ αὐτῇ πάρεστι)".

46 In fact, when all names are proffered, counterbalanced by their contraries, every name indicates only the fact that one thing or another exists—without focusing on its limits—, the very fact that the thing was caused to exist, and thus, the very first cause of everything.

Yet, there is a certain ambiguity regarding this discourse that utters everything and nothing in particular. On the one hand, Dionysius says that God can be and must be praised through everything, practically through any word. On the other hand, he says that we cannot say anything about God, except for what God has told us about himself.[47] In fact, the divine writers themselves name God through all names (ἐκ παντὸς ὀνόματος).[48] Thus, we are to use the names of all things, but only in the way of the divine writers, which follow the manner in which God says everything about himself.

Thus, Dionysius does not praise God using his own words (practically any word would do), but he actually prays God to give him the right words to praise Him: "And for myself I pray God grant me worthily to declare the beneficent and manifold Names of the Unutterable and Nameless Godhead, and that He do not take away the word of Truth out of my mouth".[49] Thus, prayer has an even more precise sense: it means to ask God for the very names through which he should be praised. Dionysius prays to praise well, or even, he prays to pray well, and that God might give him the right words to praise and to pray. Dionysius does not intend to say anything at all about God, nothing which could come from his human mind; yet, he intends to do something that, from the Neoplatonic perspective, would seem even more inacceptable: he intends to speak the very words of the unspeakable God[50] (as God would want to show himself), and to utter the names of God (even though he says God is nameless).[51] This might seem a very daring project; yet, on a closer look, Dionysius' task seems to be that of keeping silent in face of God's presence.

In fact, all divine names derive from silence, and are finally reintegrated into silence. Dionysius shows that the hymns we bring to God are not simply con-

47 *Divine Names*, I 1, 108. 6–8: "This is why we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed".

48 *Divine Names*, I 6, 118. 2–3.

49 *Divine Names*, I 8, 121. 16–18.

50 *Divine Names*, I 1, 107. 4–108. 5: "Here too let us hold on to the scriptural rule that when we say anything about God, we should set down the truth "not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit" to the scripture writers, a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect". Thus, in a way, it is not himself talking, but it is God himself who would allow him to speak and, moreover, give him the right words to do this.

51 *Divine Names*, I 8, 121. 16–17: "the beneficent and divine names of the unutterable and unnameable Deity".

trived by us, nor does their meaning depend on our usual understanding. On the contrary: it is the thearchy (the divine principle: θεαρχία) itself which leads us to these hymns and which shows us their real meaning, on the condition that we honour the inexpressible through silence: "With a wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible (τὰ δὲ ἀῤῥητα σώφρονι σιγῇ τιμῶντες). We are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures, and with these to illuminate us, with our beings shaped to songs of praise, we behold the divine light, in a manner befitting us, and our praise resounds for that generous Source of all holy enlightenment, a Source which has told us about itself in the holy words of scripture".[52] Dionysius assumes that the light of the divine principle already shines upon us, but that we are unable to perceive this presence hidden in everything that exists. In order to uncover it (i.e. to become aware of it and thus present towards it), we have to admit the inexpressible and to honour it accordingly, as inexpressible, as something that imposes silence. It is this very silence in face of the unutterable that allows us to address God by all possible names, starting from the highest to the most humble, and then to deny them all, starting from the last ones, up to the highest predicates.

Our silence in face of the unutterable allows this unutterable presence to shine its light upon us and to give us the right names for praising it.[53] There is a certain circularity implied here: the divine names in the Scriptures are shedding their light upon us, thus making us praise God through hymns, in order that we see the light bestowed upon us through these hymns, and that we properly praise God through hymns.[54] The divine names themselves lead us to rightly understanding the divine names and to rightly praising and praying to God through them.[55] Yet this can only happen when we start with silence. Only

52 *Divine Names*, I 3, 111. 6–12. See also *Celestial Hierarchy*, IV 4: the shepherds receive the news of Jesus' birth after they have been purified through seclusion and through silence.

53 For Dionysius, God has hidden the intelligible in the sensible, and what is above being in beings. Thus, God's unutterable nature can uncover itself through beings and through the divine names (eventually, the name of any being can be a divine name, when used properly). See *Divine Names*, I 4, 114. 1–7: "We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses. And so it is that the Transcendent is clothed in the terms of being, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity".

54 *Divine Names*, I 3, 111. 7–12.

55 Raising the question of the relationship between knowledge (the hierarchical science) and

when we realise that we are speaking about something that surpasses intellect and deserves silence, only then can we properly receive the divine names, and praise them accurately. These names are right—and are divine names—only inasmuch as we are aware that they refer to the unutterable. Otherwise, they are simply the names of things, of being.

Thus, all names spring from silence; but they also turn back to silence. In fact, all the names attributed to God (both affirmative and negative ones) are actually said in a reversed way: they are not directly revealing a particular thing, but they are actually *covering* God.[56] Behind all known things and behind all possible attributes, there cannot be yet another thing, with a proper description, but something completely unknown and unnamed. Therefore, while praising and indicating God, the names are actually concealing him, because their nature is completely different from his own. They are conveying him as hidden.[57]

All names through which God is praised are actually saying that they don't designate God: they still indicate towards him, but eventually they no longer apply to him. This is precisely why, for Dionysius, God has all names: because in fact, all names hide him, and all names indicate the very fact that God cannot be named.[58] God's most appropriate and wonderful name (τὸ θαυμαστὸν

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prayer, René Roques notices: "Chronologiquement, Denys situe la prière avant l'investigation théologique proprement dite. […] Si donc, en un sens, la prière précède le travail de l'intelligence, en un autre sens, il faut dire qu'elle le suit, puisqu'elle succède normalement à la prise de conscience de notre insuffisance essentielle." (*Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le pseudo-Denys*, Paris, 1954, p. 129).

56 In Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition. Despoiling the Hellenes*, Ashgate, 2007, p. 119, we read: "the journey to the divine, for Dionysius, begins at the level of discourse, including the divine names, scriptures and liturgy; here, one can find God in his accessible, perceptible form". We doubt, however, that, for Dionysius, God could ever be accessible as such, at any level; in fact, even if God has all names, he has them inasmuch as he is hiding behind all things. God unveils his presence through everything, but this is still the presence of a nameless God.

57 See for instance *Divine Names*, I 2, 110. 7–10: "Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also 'unsearchable and inscrutable,' since there is not a trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity".

58 *Divine Names*, I 6, 118. 2–3: "Realizing all this, the theologians praise it by every name and as the Nameless One (Τοῦτο γοῦν εἰδότες οἱ θεολόγοι καὶ ὡς ἀνώνυμον αὐτὴν ὑμνοῦσι καὶ ἐκ παντὸς ὀνόματος.)". Dionysius links here the two hypotheses in Plato's *Parmenides*: the first one, whose conclusion is that the One has no name, and the second, in which the One has all names.

ὄνομα)[59] is precisely "the unnamed" (ἀνώνυμον) or "above any name" (τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα).[60] Names are telling us that, behind them, there is something that names cannot describe, but they tend to conceal. Thus, all known things and all attributes taken from the known things are praising the unknown as their cause, and are indicating it, not by describing it directly, but by covering it.

Ultimately, all names praise the very fact that they are not saying anything, but that they are covering the unknown; they praise the fact that God remains inaccessible to words, to hymns, and that there is no name through which we could actually say anything about God.[61] Therefore, in order to uncover this unknown that names are both indicating and covering, names themselves must both be uttered and reduced to silence. They must be used (in order that we become aware that they are indicating and covering something), but then, they must be suppressed (in order that we discover what they are actually hiding). Thus, the reverent silence in front of the inexpressible prepares us for uttering all names; in its turn, this "total discourse" eventually turns silent: "But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable (ἄφωνος ἔσται καὶ ὅλως ἑνωθήσεται τῷ ἀφθέγκτῳ)".[62]

The silence in the end, however, is not the same as that in the beginning. This second silence, this wordlessness (ἀλογία), or voiceless discourse (ἄφωνος),[63] answers God's own silence,[64] his own speechlessness (ἀφθεγξία).[65] God's silence (σιγή), this complete priority to words, is also indicated as peace and tranquility (εἰρήνης καὶ ἡσυχίας): "The name is given to the way in which God is still and tranquil (ἡσυχίαν ἄγει), keeping to himself and within himself in an

59 This "wonderful" name reminds us of Damascius (*De principiis*, w. I 14. 4–17), for whom the principle was reckoned to be wonderful through the very fact of refraining from any conjecture about it. Yet, for Dionysius, this impossibility of naming God becomes in itself a divine name.

60 *Divine Names*, I 6, 118. 8–10: "This surely is the wonderful 'name which is above every name' and is therefore without a name. It is surely the name established 'above every name that is named either in this age or in that which is to come'".

61 See for instance *Divine Names*, I, 2, p. 110. 7–10.

62 *Mystical Theology*, III 147. 10–14.

63 *Mystical Theology*, III 147. 13.

64 *Divine Names*, IV 22, 170. 5: "the silence in the inner sanctuaries (ἐν ἀδύτοις σιγῆς)".

65 *Mystical Theology*, III 147. 14. See also *Divine Names*, XI 1, 218. 8: ἣν ὁ ἱερὸς Ἰοῦστος ἀφθεγξίαν καλεῖ.

absolutely transcendent unity of self".[66] This ἡσυχία, however, becomes in its turn a name for us, and then, just as any other name, it is denied of God.[67]

All that the divine names tell us about is eventually this wordlessness, this speechlessness and silence of God. This is "the silence in the sanctuary",[68] that the angels announce. We are dealing, however, with a particular kind of silence. If our silence opposes speech and is thus still discursive, God's silence has a different meaning: in this case, we don't have a discourse interrupted by silence, but a complete surpassing of any discourse, because "it is beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things".[69] God's silence is his unspeakable character, his complete wordlessness. It is not the silence to which our discourse is finally reduced, but rather the absolute unspeakability that precedes any utterance. Ultimately, to hold a discourse about God (θεολογία) means to speak about silence. At the very peak of the mystical writings, Dionysius expects to find not a particular knowledge, but the darkness of a mystically-hidden silence,[70] covering God's words, beyond unknowing, beyond the suppression of every name.

Yet, God's silence can only be understood through this opposition: on the one hand, God "says" everything, giving being to every thing and symbolising himself through everything; on the other hand, God is completely prior to any expression and symbol.[71] Thus, God is both silent (in the sense of a complete priority to expression) and the one who "says" everything. On the one hand, he can say absolutely everything about himself, inasmuch as he expresses himself, as cause of everything; but this is precisely because, in the end, what he is thus speaking about is a total silence that precedes any possible assertion. He thus remains silent, as the one which both generates this "total discourse", being the ultimate "subject" of everything that can be said, and as the one

66 *Divine Names*, XI 1, 218. 9–10.

67 *Mystical Theology*, V 149. 5: οὔτε ἡσυχίαν ἄγει.

68 *Divine Names*, IV 22.

69 *Mystical Theology*, V 150. 7–8.

70 *Mystical Theology*, I 1, 142. 1–2. It is not a manifest silence, that could be expressed as such, but a silence that is itself hidden, two times hidden (the term κρυφιομύστος—mystically-hidden—being composed of two terms that indicate the impossibility of seeing, of perceiving in any way).

71 On the one hand, he who receives all names has in fact no name in particular; on the other hand, he who is unnamed can only suggest himself through all names, and not only through some names, for, in this case, he would actually be delimited by a definite number of names, of attributes, he would be this, but not that. Therefore: "the theologians praise it by every name and as the Nameless One" (*Divine Names*, I 6, 118. 2–3).

who suspends this discourse, inasmuch as nothing can express him. All things through which God pluralises and symbolises himself are actually announcing and symbolising his silent, unspeakable nature. Silence cannot be expressed as such, but it can be announced: the angels are messengers of this silence,[72] and all reality is finally a hierarchical structure through which God's silence is announced.

Thus, the divine names spring from silence—from our silence, which reckons that we cannot in fact say anything about God—, they are reduced to silence, and they "speak" about the silence of God, who expresses himself through every name, yet remains unnamed, unsaid. Yet, no possible name is able to convey God himself, or to break this tremendous silence of the unspeakable God. All the words—that Dionysius prays God to grant him and then addresses back to him, in prayer—hide the silence of God. Ultimately, prayer is this kind of discourse that says everything, but reckons to say nothing, yet makes us aware of this unspeakable silence which it is all about.

Concluding Remarks

Thus, while for Damascius, the silence surrounding the ineffable is like a harbour, protecting it from any discursive intrusion, for Dionysius, God has a silence of his own, and this is precisely because God also "speaks" about himself in a certain way. He speaks of himself through any word and through any thing; yet, what he thus speaks about is not a certain thing, but rather his inexpressible nature. He speaks about himself through all names and through all things; but what remains behind the names and what God himself is, after all these names have been uttered, is not still something, and is not still another name, but rather the pure unknowable and absolute silence. He speaks about his silence, which no name or thing can encompass.

Thus, if Damascius felt he should not have spoken about the ineffable, and therefore prays for forgiveness, Dionysius speaks about God, but he does this already in a prayer. He never speaks about God in a direct manner, be it affirmative or negative, but he addresses God by all names, only as invocations and symbols, in which God himself reveals and hides himself, or reveals himself

72 *Divine Names*, IV 2, 145. 8: ἐξαγγελτικὰς τῆς θείας σιγῆς. See also *Divine Names*, IV 22, 169. 22–170. 5: "The angel is an image of God. He is a manifestation of the hidden light. He is a mirror, pure, bright, untarnished, unspotted, receiving, if one may say so, the full loveliness of the divine goodness and purely enlightening within itself as far as possible the goodness of the silence in the inner sanctuaries".

as hidden. For Damascius, the principle could not be expressed through words, which are inevitably plural. On the contrary, for Dionysius, God can be praised through everything, because he is nothing in particular. Anything that exists is an expression of God's silence, and to pray is to tell everything back to God, who uttered them all.

For Dionysius, there is no reason trying to aporetically prove that this or other attribute is inadequate—as Damascius did—, because, in fact, no attribute is meant to tell us something about God, but any attribute is a praise to God and a cover that must eventually be given away. The adequate manner of speaking about God is not the first Platonic hypothesis (as it was for Proclus), nor the reversal of the discourse (as it was for Damascius). Dionysius says we should actually use all names, as praises for the nameless one, and for his absolute silence, which nothing can express. Ultimately, we should resume our prayerful discourse in a complete silence, through which we can unite to him who silently says everything.

We can now turn to the questions we formulated in the beginning, and recognise the fact that Dionysius is actually speaking about God, about his silence, and expects to get to silence precisely through discourse. Thus, if Damascius felt it would not be appropriate to talk about the ineffable, but rather to rest in the sanctuary of silence in our souls, for Dionysius, we can actually speak about silence, and it is God himself who leads us to silence. In fact, this is a silence expressed through everything said and existent: it is God's own silence, hidden behind everything, and which words both cover and reveal.

How does Dionysius get to silence through discourse, as he prays in the beginning of the *Mystical Theology*? In fact, he gets to silence inasmuch as he proves that this prayerful discourse must result in silence and match God's silence. Dionysius renders this silence, inasmuch as he suggests that any word ultimately refers to God's silence. Lastly, how are we to understand a silent, unspeakable God, who speaks about himself, while yet remaining silent and unspeakable? For the Neoplatonic thinkers before Dionysius, the principle was inaccessible to words, and therefore it was always a problem to speak about the unspeakable. For Dionysius, however, God is inexpressible, but he also expresses himself through everything; thus, there is no longer contrariety between words and the inexpressible. God is inexpressible not because he opposes the plurality of words and of things, but because he is expressible through everything, in such a complete manner that, in fact, he remains in himself untouched by any word, by any expression.

If Damascius is trying to talk about God and proves that it is impossible, Dionysius is trying to uncover God's presence in and through everything that

can be said. Thus, Damascius comes to the silence imposed by the impossibility of speaking of the unspeakable, while Dionysius reaches the silence that crowns this "total discourse" about God. In this case, however, the discourse is no longer predicative, but praise and prayer, the ultimate praise and prayer being silence itself.[73]

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